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BUILDING A DELI BREAKFAST PROGRAM



Don't miss out on this lucrative day part that can add incremental sales to the department.

BY CAROL BAREUTHER

Nutritionists say breakfast is the most important meal of the day. Number crunchers, especially those in many supermarket delis, will beg to differ. That's because breakfast traditionally has taken a backseat to lunch and dinner as the meat and potatoes of the deli's dollars. No longer. Some delis, such as those with strong prepared food programs and in-store cafés, are jump-starting the day's register rings by offering a repast for their early risers. This includes everything from

grab-and-go to sit-down restaurant-style menu options. For those delis that don't have a breakfast program, the good news is that it's easier to implement than expected.

"We discovered breakfast was a missed sales opportunity several years ago, as we ventured into the morning offerings along with all the fast food restaurants and coffee shops in the country," says Richard Ferranda, foodservice and cheese director at Bristol Farms, a 12-store chain headquartered in Carson, CA. "We figured the

stores are open early and we are selling coffee and juice to our customers already, maybe we should be offering some prepared breakfast to our customers."

What's For Breakfast?

Breakfast is the most functional and routine meal of the day, according to the report, *Transformation of the American Meal 2017*, published by the Hartman Group Inc., a Bellevue, WA-headquartered food industry research and consulting firm.



As such, breakfast is typically focused on quick, often portable options that provide nutritious, lasting energy.

In terms of actual foods, ethnic-inspired items such as huevos rancheros, avocado toast, traditional ethnic breakfast foods, overnight oats and breakfast hash are the top five breakfast/brunch trends according to the nearly 700 professional chef members of the American Culinary Federation surveyed in the Washington, D.C.-based National Restaurant Association's *What's Hot 2018 Culinary Forecast*.

"Omelets do well, yet it's our signature breakfast burritos that steal the show. Perhaps it's that they are easy to grab-and-go while making the morning commute," says Bristol Farms' Ferranda.

Breakfast sandwiches are driving growth in the restaurant arena and are a natural for the supermarket deli, according to Shayna Snyder, senior product manager for Y-Pulse, LLC, a subsidiary of Olson Communications, Inc., a Chicago-based food-focused marketing company. "A few new and unexpected items like breakfast pizza and breakfast quesadillas are also now emerging."

One of the most popular types of breakfast sandwiches is the New York deli-style bacon, egg and cheese, says Megan Dorsch, marketing manager for Nueske's Applewood Smoked Meats, in Wittenberg, WI. "Premium bacons and cheeses are being worked into these simple sandwiches to breathe new life into them and make them even more memorable to today's customers.

The company now offers thicker cuts of its most-popular Applewood Smoked Bacon and the company's newest, Wild Cherrywood Smoked Uncured Bacon. The added width creates a dramatic looking and tasting breakfast sandwich, says Dorsch. She adds that delis can choose to slice their own bacon off the slab or simply order pre-sliced to the desired thickness.

Beyond sandwiches, bowls, bakes, wraps and hashes make great deli breakfast selections. This is especially true when made with potato products, such as French fries, often sold at lunch and dinner, as well. For example, the J.R. Simplot Co. offers a foodservice-size recipe for its Sidewinders Fries Breakfast. Sidewinders are the Boise, ID-headquartered company's signature-style twisty-shaped fries that come in four flavors. This breakfast recipe calls for the battered variety, along with roasted peppers and onions, scram-



bled eggs and turkey ham all sold in a single-serve bowl. Other breakfast recipes the company offers for its potato products includes an egg-based Farmer's Breakfast Bake, Southwest Deli Breakfast Wrap and a Roasted Sweet Potato Breakfast Hash.

"If the supermarket deli already has made a big investment in a hot bar for retail meal solutions, breakfast is an excellent opportunity to get more use out of this piece of equipment," says Travis Dryden, senior marketing manager for J.R. Simplot's commercial accounts.

Making It Happen

One of the biggest challenges for supermarket delis in implementing a breakfast program is competition from restaurants, especially quick-serve restaurants for weekday business, says Y-Pulse's Snyder. "It's a little bit unexpected for consumers to think about getting a ready-to-eat breakfast at the deli. However, it seems that consumers would be open to this new behavior, evidenced by three points that we discovered in last year's *Deli Experience* survey. First, that 72 percent of respondents like a supermarket deli where the prepared foods are comparable in quality to their favorite restaurant. Secondly, that 60 percent of surveyed consumers consider the deli a good option for prepared meals that can be brought to work. Third, 54 percent of consumers surveyed wished their local deli had catered meals as good as their favorite restaurant."

Snyder adds that with delivery becoming more popular, having mobile ordering and curb-side pickup integrated into the deli's foodservice offerings would be an opportunity for supermarkets to gain some share of dollars from younger consumers who are more apt to use technology to order food and do so at traditional restaurants.

Another hurdle is the labor needed to prepare and staff the deli at breakfast time. For example, the prospect of expanding to this morning meal at some Bristol Farms' locations was a no-brainer, according to Ferranda, as these stores already had restaurants and line cooks scheduled early for the full-service experience. In this case, all he had to do was have the line cook prepare some hotel pans of scrambled eggs, grill off some extra home fries and bingo a small offering of breakfast was available in the deli. The next question then became what to do at the chain's other locations. Some of these operations were really small, and finding additional hours to capture the

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morning sales without jeopardizing lunch and dinner sale was Ferranda's dilemma. In the end, he made the investment to bring a cook in early enough to execute a full breakfast offering.

"It paid off," he says. Today, "we offer a variety of breakfast foods such as scrambled eggs, sausage links and breakfast potatoes to appeal to a broad range of customers. The cooks are armed with some simple pre-made and pre-cut solutions to the morning fare in addition to cooking some items from scratch. Foodlike Belgium Waffles, pre-cut potatoes with peppers and onions, and ground black pepper bacon sausage that can be made into patties or used in a scramble are a few. Having some pre-made options also allows us to offer some popular extras: egg whites are a must in addition to your traditional egg offerings, and oatmeal is very popular, even in Southern California."

Setting up an oatmeal bar, yogurt bar or similar DIY selections would make it easy for retailers and consumers who are used to building a salad based on a per-pound price, says Y-Pulse's Snyder. "Oatmeal is on the menu at popular restaurants like QSR, coffee cafés and casual dining, making it ubiquitous in consumers' minds as an item that should be available everywhere."

Beyond the deli, Bristol Farms merchandises breakfast foods in several areas of the store.

"If you have a coffee bar with a self-serve offering, consider having fresh-cut fruit and yogurt parfait cups with granola as cold options. With the addition of a Turbo Chef speed oven in the operation, a cold breakfast sandwich or a burrito can quickly become a warm morning meal. Our coffee and juice bar departments are all cross merchandised with these offerings," says Ferranda.

Eggs are a breakfast staple. New hard-cooked and peeled egg products from Prime Foods, called Pro-Go Protein Packs, are perfect for selling in the wall deli or refrigerated snack cases at the front of the store any time of day or at in-store beverage bars

for breakfast. The four-item single-serve line includes two eggs; one egg, pepper jack cheese and Genoa salami; one egg, Colby Jack cheese and dark chocolate-coated almonds; and one egg, Gouda cheese and dark chocolate espresso beans.

"This line capitalizes on the trend we're seeing in consumers looking at adding more protein to their diets," says Cindy McGarrigle, vice president of sales for the Boonville, IN-based company. "On the operator side, our product has a 70-day shelf life. If a supermarket deli hard boiled and packed their own eggs, the shelf life is a week or less."

Use all the tricks of the trade to let customers know the deli is a destination for breakfast. For example, Bristol Farms uses its self-serve hot cases to show off its menu choices, along with simple signage that states availability and price. Other suggestions include digital-, online- or circular-advertised special pricing, offering bundled meal deals like a breakfast sandwich, side of breakfast potatoes and coffee for one price, and even having front register cashiers wear buttons that let shoppers know the deli now serves breakfast.

Finally, the key to developing, building and sustaining a morning business in the deli is consistency, says Ferranda. "Customers once familiarized with your breakfast offerings will be back during the week to shop again. The key to success is timing: knowing when the food needs to be ready, knowing when it is time to end and knowing when to switch out to the lunch menu. This timing will be different in every location. City stores will see more traffic earlier than residential stores, where sales are softer as people have more time and options. If there's debate regarding offering breakfast on the weekend, stop thinking and start cooking. Weekends are as popular as weekdays, with Sunday being one of the best sale days of the week. After all, they say breakfast is the most important meal of the day. It certainly has become so for us and will continue to be a focus point in the future, as sales continue to grow." **DB**