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2006 DELI REPORT

Piled High

BY LYNN PETRAK

Deli cases, including service counters and self-serve sections, combine classic with cutting-edge meat and poultry offerings

There's turkey, and then there is the scope of turkey products available in today's delis, from buffalo-glazed, sliced-to-order luncheon meats to heat-and-serve entrees ladled with gravy to turkey chili merchandised in large cauldrons to entice the lunch and dinner crowd.

Those examples are but a few, and the bird certainly isn't alone. Proteins like beef, pork and chicken also have gone upscale and often wildly diverse

Sharon Olson, a deli expert and president of Chicago-based Olson Communications, underscores the fact that many retailers value the deli as a portal for strengthening a store's equity. According to a survey recently commissioned by Olson Communications, 43 percent of customers say the quality of their deli experience is a "very important" and "important" factor in the supermarket they choose. "So, merchandising the deli does a lot more for the store than just increase deli sales, it reflects on the total shopping experience," Olson points out.



Photos courtesy of Bar-S Foods

The notion of the deli as a destination is not anything new and dates back at least a decade. Over the past several years, there have been several examples of meat-based programs that work and others that do not. Still, the deli remains a hotbed of activity and interest as various retail channels from mainstream supermarkets to specialty grocers to mass merchandisers try to attract consumers through offerings that are flavorful, convenient, and comparatively budget-friendly.

Retailers continue to look at the deli as both a standard for staples and a lure for fresh products and unique promotions, according to industry observers.

"There is clearly an effort by grocers to attract customers via deli,"

Continued on page 10