

# IDDBA Report: Best Basics And Beyond



By  
**Sharon Olson**

*President  
Olson  
Communications  
Chicago, IL*

**T**he IDDBA show was a wonderland of choices for delis looking for ways to cater to today's fly-by shoppers — those more interested in finding fabulous options for tonight's dinner or grabbing a quick snack than in stocking up on a week's groceries.

Today's deli consumers have redefined cooking, continually raising the bar on the foods that intrigue them.

Exhibitors were ready to please, offering a myriad of options.

**Fresh Chilled:** Consumers seeking convenience are unwilling to compromise on fresh. Refrigerated fully prepared entrées and side dishes fit the bill. Component kits make it easy for delis to create unique recipes for many of the most popular salad items. Some suppliers also offered small-batch products to create special signature dishes that let delis give the impression they have a chef on-premises.

**Fresh, Fast And Handheld:** A vast array of choices was available for deli operators to offer handheld convenience foods with healthfulness and appetite appeal. Hummus and pita chips, sushi, and a wide variety of wraps are perfect for customers looking for a healthful alternative to quick-service restaurants. Fresh, healthful and handheld Asian foods, in particular, appeal to mainstream consumers.

**Classic Comfort:** Varieties of meat loaf, mashed potatoes and tomato soup — from organic to super indulgent — were anything but basic. Real food with authentic ingredients topped the list of items destined to be a hit. Organic products proved healthfulness doesn't mean compromising on real flavor. Spectacularly indulgent gourmet mac-and-cheese varieties made indulgence worth the splurge.

**Handcrafted, Housemade And One Of A Kind:** The appeal of handcrafted artisan cheeses created excitement and energy. Buyers clearly responded to cheesemakers talking about their craft and the distinctive flavor profiles of their cheeses. Operators sought distinctive cheeses in fresh, flavorful, soft-ripened and aged varieties to please a wide range of customers. Premium sliced cheeses and cured meats became a new opportunity to make deli sandwiches a cut above local restaurant menus.

Deli operators had a wide range of resources to offer the appeal of "homemade." Exquisite individual desserts offered a touch of indulgence. Organic speed scratch items like pie shells and broths presented delis with easy ways to create signature natural and organic prepared foods.

**Home Meal Experience:** It's always been about the food; now it's also about the experience. The show offered a wide range of products to help delis compete with meal

assembly centers (MACs), those new competitors that are finding customers eager for their unique offerings of convenience, control and satisfaction in creating a delightful meal experience. MACs market the experience, but consumers return for the convenience.

Delis have the opportunity to match that convenience — providing no-assembly-required meal solutions on a rotating basis for customers who don't even have time to plan a trip to their local MAC. Piggly Wiggly has incorporated Dream Dinners on-site, and McCaffrey Markets has created a meal assembly program called Stu-

dio Gourmet.

**Right Size Portions:** Deli operators found many innovative ways to offer the magic of 100-calorie snack portions. Consumers are craving flavor, but they welcome the nutritional and low-cal payback that comes with skipping the temptation of multiple portions in the grocery aisles. Organic soups like creamy tomato and creamy roasted carrot, and natural cheeses in individual portion packs also hit the mark.

Mini-meals and "portions for one or two" bring gourmet sensibility to smaller households craving a restaurant quality meal at home. By filling this niche with small plates, delis can gain a unique advantage over club stores and restaurants.

**Going Green — Balancing Dollars and Desire:** The decision to "go green" is easy from an ethical standpoint. Making it happen can be confusing and difficult, but operators shared ideas and exhibitors presented a range of solutions. It is not necessary to be a mega-company to make a difference. However, any green initiative needs to be credible, appropriate to the company and implemented consistently. If consumer support for companies that are good environmental citizens continues to grow, "going green" is looking like the way to green up the bottom line as well.

**Organic Goes Mainstream:** Organic is going mainstream; savvy operators are marketing great taste and stealth health. Operators found a wide variety of products that allowed delis to offer organic and fair trade products. These options offer consumers added value that is both relevant and reasonably priced.

**Foods With Integrity:** Consumers want to know what's in their food — not just the ingredients, but the entire process. They are willing to pay extra for high-quality food with "integrity." In the deli, the retailer's brand is the one consumers trust. They expect their local store to scrutinize the ingredients and the process. Many exhibitors featured their company's philosophy, farming practices and commitment to sustainability, thus demonstrating their understanding of the importance of consumer trust.