

by A. Elizabeth Sloan

## Prime Time for Meat and Poultry

Despite the economic free fall in recent months, the market for meat and poultry products is trending upward, according to a variety of measures, and there is ample opportunity for additional growth. McDonald's offers a *Southern-Style Chicken Biscuit* at breakfast, and Domino's Pizza is also delivering sub sandwiches. Rotisserie chicken leads the list of supermarket takeout meals, according to Technomic Inc. NPD reports that the use of the backyard grill is at an all-time high, and 17% of all households are grilling year-round.

NPD also reports that in July 2008, 45% of consumers were stocking up, 42% cooking more at home, and 31% serving less-expensive cuts of meat than they did a year ago. Statistics like the preceding suggest that it's time for grocery retailers and foodservice operators to embrace the fact that consumers are trading down and to re-introduce slow-cooked meat and classic comfort favorites such as pot roast, corned beef, and Swiss steak.

Retailers might consider offering recipes, meal solution ideas, and pre-cut, marinated meat in cheaper cuts, as well as developing meal starter kits for stir-fries, stews, soups, and skillet meals. It's also a good idea to cross-promote them with produce, marinades, and even wine. The *2008 Power of Meat Survey* from the Food Marketing Institute (FMI) found

that half (49%) of shoppers use these suggestions *very frequently or sometimes*.

Americans also are entertaining more at home. On any given night, 3% of Americans are a dinner guest in someone else's home, reports NPD. Freezer-to-oven-to-table meat preparations, more affordable gourmet "company" meal solutions, and party platters will find a welcome market. Most people use the full-service meat counter when purchasing for special occasions

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such as family gatherings and parties, according to FMI.

According to *Restaurant & Institutions' 2007 New American Diner Study*, Gen Yers would order chicken for an entrée if dining out tonight, Gen Xers steak, and boomers fish/seafood. With Gen Yers having the greatest interest in gourmet, ethnic, and natural foods—and a tendency to become bored quickly—the time for restaurant operators to upgrade the flavor profile of burgers, nuggets, and chicken sandwiches is now. Sandwich/burger hybrids, pot roast, prime rib, sirloin, Kobe beef, carne asada, cured meats, and Angus beef are among the specialty sandwiches currently grabbing the attention of these young "foodies." Greek, Cajun, Southern (U.S.), and Pan Asian will be the next wave

in the sandwich category.

Adults age 50 or older are the No. 1 consumers of duck, pork, meat roasts, veal, ham, turkey, lamb, ribs, stews, steaks, pot pies, and premium cuts—and both retailers and restaurants need to keep pace with their meat preferences. Despite snacks accounting for more than half of all growth in restaurants in 2007 per NPD, their variety is sadly lacking. To enliven menus, possibilities include converting chicken nuggets

Consumers have also started thinking more about where their food comes from and how it is produced, which creates an opportunity for premium products, although it might also translate into problems for the meat and poultry industry. A new country-of-origin law covering meat went into effect this fall.

Nine out of 10 consumers (93%) are *extremely familiar* with the term Kosher; for the terms locally raised/locally grown, the figure is 80%, and for free-

to *Cordon Bleu Bites*, creating mini-meat kabobs, and/or offering meat-filled filled papas, empanadas, or piroshki.

Grass-fed and free-range products, alternative red meats/game animals, and duck were the hottest entrée/main dish culinary trends for 2008 cited by American Culinary Foundation chefs in a 2007 National Restaurant Assn. survey. One-fifth of Americans purchased natural or organic meats in 2007, according to statistics from FMI's meat report. Although it accounts for only 1.7% of total beef sold, sales of natural/organic beef jumped 33% last year, according to FreshLook Marketing. However, with Information Resources Inc. reporting that half (52%) of shoppers are buying fewer organic products in 2008, the organic segment will likely slow.

range it is 70%. Locally raised/grown is most important to 63% of consumers, followed by farm-raised at 34%, and humane treatment at 30%, reports the 2008 International Dairy Deli Bakery Assn.'s *Health & Wellness Driven Consumer Report*.

Changing eating patterns, demographic preferences, and health and safety issues, along with current economic conditions, present both challenges and new opportunities for the meat industry. Innovative, flavorful, and convenient options that are affordable and free of unwanted hormones, antibiotics, additives, and preservatives will make the cut. **FT**



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