

# CHEESE MARKET NEWS<sup>®</sup>

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## Pizza, dairy industries work to provide healthier options

By Alyssa Sowerwine

**MADISON, Wis.**—While pizza is still easily one of Americans' favorite foods, increasing awareness and concern around obesity, sodium intake and general healthy eating could prove challenging for a food largely viewed as "indulgent."

A recent "Pizza at Foodservice and Retail" report released by market researcher Packaged Facts provides analysis of consumer demographics, attitudes and behaviors as they relate to the pizza industry, derived from the 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012 Experian Simmons National Consumer Surveys. The report also includes analysis of Packaged Facts' August 2012

proprietary 2,000-respondent pizza survey commissioned exclusively for the report.

Packaged Facts' "Pizza at Foodservice and Retail" report projects U.S. frozen and refrigerated pizza sales to register sales of \$4.91 billion in 2012, down 0.9 percent from 2011. It also forecasts U.S. frozen and refrigerated pizza 2011-2014 compound annual growth of -0.1 percent, with one reason for the drop related to health.

"Our survey results suggest a clear trend toward healthier options and home-based cost savings at the expense of pizza," says David Morris, Packaged Facts report author. "When asked about 17 different foods and food types, consumers are more likely to be 'eating more' of those with stronger general health attributes and with home-based cost savings. Unfortunately for pizza purveyors, consumers are less likely to be eating more pizza, whether it is restaurant pizza, frozen pizza or fresh/refrigerated pizza."

The report also cites competition from limited-service takeout and delivery options as a roadblock to boosting refrigerated and frozen pizza sales, as well as the fact that roughly 97 percent of adults

eat pizza, a level of penetration that Morris says both shows how many people enjoy pizza and also suggests difficulty in growing a commoditized market in the face of healthy eating headwinds.

The report says the message to pizza purveyors is clear: enhance the overall healthfulness of pizza, at least incrementally, and experiment with options providing more clear-cut healthfulness without sacrificing taste.

Fortunately for the pizza industry and its fans, pizza can fit into a balanced, healthy diet and provide many nutrients such as calcium, protein and fiber, provided it is consumed in moderation, says the American Pizza Community (APC), a coalition of the nation's largest pizza companies, small business franchise owners, regional chains, suppliers and other entities that make up the U.S. pizza industry.

APC notes tips for consumers to choose a healthier pizza, including opting for thin crust, reduced-fat cheese, lots of veggies, lower-fat meats and perhaps most important — consuming in moderation.

Portion control is key with pizza, says Debbi Beauvais, a registered dietitian and

spokesperson for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.

"When you look at pizza, you have to look at portion sizes," she says. "A slice of pizza with a salad and a glass of milk is a great meal."

Sbarro LLC, Melville, N.Y., which typically offers its pizza in a by-the-slice format, recently introduced a new Sbarro Skinny Slice, a 270-calorie slice of pizza topped with roasted red and green bell peppers, portabella mushrooms, caramelized onions and a sprinkling of Mozzarella and Pecorino Romano cheeses.

"We created the Skinny Slice as a delicious way to help our guests stick to their New Year's resolutions and still get their fix of authentic Italian pizza done the Sbarro way," says Jim Greco, CEO, Sbarro. He says the product is the latest in a series of menu innovations as Sbarro continues to provide more options to its customers.

Beauvais notes that pizza is a convenient food that is satisfying, and there is good nutrition potential based on the toppings that are chosen.

Beauvais says pizza makers and restaurants have the opportunity to increase marketing of

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whole grain crusts and more fruit and veggie toppings.

She adds that if one chain begins to focus on pizza's more healthful attributes, it's likely other companies will follow suit.

The Packaged Facts report also notes that restaurants could beef up efforts to offer pizza with whole grain or gluten-free crusts and call out pizza's more healthful attributes on their menus. The report says that while health claims are often woven into menus, pizza is simply not positioned with the health-driven terminology: only 2.3 percent of restaurants serving pizza as an entree associate it with "gluten free" on the menu, and "lowfat" and "organic" are associated with only 1.9 percent and 1.1 percent, respectively.

"This miniscule degree of penetration suggests that restaurant operators can experiment more with healthful claims that resonate with pizza eaters," the report says.

The report also notes that a slew of vegetable options are available at 10 percent or more of restaurants serving pizza entrees.

"As an inherently healthy food, vegetables provide an ideal vehicle for purveyors to ratchet up pizza's health profile while catering to consumers' needs while not having to aggressively sell the concept to consumers, who already order pizzas with vegetables in abundance," the report says.

Morris notes a lot of the boutique pizza brands are showing that this can be done.

Connie's Pizza, a Chicago pizza chain, offers a Connie's Natural line that puts "natural" at the forefront of its marketing, and the line has a vegetarian multi-grain crust option, he says.

"The brand doesn't hit you over the head with 'health,' it uses 'natural' to sell itself a bit on innate healthfulness, and it provides a high-quality taste experience," he says.

• **Pizza in schools**

Beauvais — who also is district supervisor of school nutrition for Gates Chili and East Rochester Schools, Rochester, N.Y. — uses a similar tactic with pizza in a school setting.

She says the district makes a lot of its own pizzas — using a 51-percent whole grain crust, and a mix of vegetables or lowfat turkey pepperoni — but gives the pies fun names that the kids like rather than advertising the healthy attributes.

"Pizza is still a great option for school meals; it's still so popular with students, and you have to offer them something they will eat," Beauvais says. She also buys heat 'n serve pizzas that have whole wheat crust, lowfat cheese and lowfat toppings.

One of the school's most popular pizzas is a BBQ pie that features BBQ sauce and pulled pork.

Beauvais notes that pizza is an excel-

lent vehicle for introducing whole grains and fresh vegetables to kids, either at school or at home.

"We're hoping that students are becoming more savvy about fresher, healthier pizzas and are going to be looking for pizzas with whole grain crust and more vegetables as they become regular consumers in the marketplace," she says.

Domino's Pizza also continues to offer its Domino's Smart Slice School Lunch Program. Through its partnership with Dairy Management Inc. (DMI) and its nutrition arm, the National Dairy Council, Domino's is committed to supporting active lifestyles in schools as a founding partner of the GENYOUth Foundation.

Domino's Smart Slice, when topped with lite Mozzarella cheese, meets the USDA school lunch nutrition standards for calories, fat and sodium, with each slice featuring 4 grams of fiber, 24 grams of whole grains and offering a great, says Barry Friedman, director of Domino's Smart Slice School Lunch Program.

The number of schools that now participate in the Domino's Smart Slice program has increased from 1,100 schools in early 2011 to more than 3,000 schools across 37 states today.

Among the many markets that have seen significant growth, Domino's Smart Slice has been especially successful in the Granbury Public School District, Granbury, Texas, where there has been a 50-percent increase in the number of

schools participating in the Domino's Smart Slice program since January 2011.

"Pizza is without a doubt our students' favorite food, and Domino's Smart Slice allows us a more nutritious alternative," says Alicia Hernandez, school nutrition director of Granbury Public Schools. "In addition to assuring parents their children are getting the necessary nutrition, it is delicious, loved by students and already meets the nutrition standards, making Domino's Smart Slice a great win-win for us."

Friedman says Domino's is giving more options to schools to customize what they want on the pizzas to expand beyond traditional cheese and pepperoni. Smart Slices have 51-percent

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white whole-wheat flour crust, reduced-sodium pizza sauce and lite Mozzarella. Toppings also include reduced-fat and reduced-sodium pepperoni, lean protein such as chicken and ham and vegetable toppings.

The program offers several varieties with fun names for kids, such as Bellroni, featuring lite Mozzarella, reduced-fat pepperoni, green peppers and roasted red peppers with a sprinkle of Parmesan; BBQ Smokehouse, featuring smoky Memphis-style BBQ sauce, lite Mozzarella, lean ham and a touch of onions; Kick'n Chicken, featuring lite

Mozzarella, grilled chicken, a sprinkle of Cheddar and tangy buffalo sauce; and Cheezzilla, featuring a combination of five different varieties of cheese including lite Mozzarella, Cheddar, Provolone, Parmesan and Asiago.

Friedman adds that Domino's continues to work very closely with DMI and its culinary partners to look at new ideas to introduce into the schools. DMI is a nonprofit organization that manages the producer checkoff program to work with and through industry and other partners to drive pre-competitive research in nutrition, products and sustainability.

• **New research**

In addition to offering lower-fat toppings and whole grain and gluten-free crusts, new research on whey permeate

may offer the pizza industry another opportunity to make healthier pies.

The Wisconsin Center for Dairy Research (CDR) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, supported in part by the Dairy Research Institute (DRI), has conducted projects using whey permeate in food formulations that are lower in sodium. DRI is an organization established under the leadership of U.S. dairy farmers through DMI.

Whey permeate is a co-product of the production of whey protein concentrate and whey protein isolate. Milk permeate is the co-product of ultrafiltered milk, milk protein concentrate or milk protein isolate. Sweet whey and milk are the most common starting materials for permeate production in the United States.

Current science indicates that whey permeate's salt-enhancing characteristics make it ideal for replacing salt in many food applications, including pizza crust, while maintaining consumer-acceptable flavor, says Kimberlee (KJ) Burrington, dairy ingredient applications coordinator at CDR.

Burrington notes that CDR research has helped identify permeate's ability to replace salt in formulations, reducing the amount of added salt in foods by 30 to 75 percent and providing a potential solution for companies seeking salt-reduction alternatives to improve sodium levels in products, including pizza dough.

CDR began conducting projects using permeate several years ago. The initial focus was on browning, flavor enhancement and cost reduction, but researchers learned that permeate also had salt-enhancement characteristics.

It is not clear which components of permeate are responsible for the salty properties. While the mechanisms are uncertain, it is possible that the non-protein nitrogen compounds — urea, creatine, creatinine, uric acid, orotic acid and ammonia — may serve as flavor potentiators. The mineral salts — calcium phosphate, magnesium, sodium and potassium — may function as salt enhancers, CDR says.

Burrington says that in general, 10 to 11 grams of permeate will replace 1 gram of salt, or 3 to 4 grams of delactosed permeate will replace 1 gram of salt in a formulation.

It also is recommended to balance the addition of permeate or delactosed permeate by reducing other macro-ingredients such as flour, fat, eggs, granulated sugar and other carbohydrates.

"In many instances, a total cost-reduced formula can also be achieved as permeate replaces other, more costly ingredients," Burrington says.

The application also applies to pizza sauce, she adds.

Burrington says CDR and DRI still are in the process of educating food companies on the technology and how it can be used.

"Each pizza manufacturer will have their own recipes, but we want to give them some basic guidelines on how to do this," she says. "We've also been working with permeate suppliers to show how permeate can be used in other applications.

"I think the important thing to understand is that reducing sodium is a difficult thing for food manufacturers to do," she adds. "Our hope is that whey permeate can be a part of that solution for pizza manufacturers."

DRI continues to sponsor research on whey permeate, and new findings are expected to be released soon, says Bill Graves, senior vice president of product research, DRI. He notes whey permeate research is part of a larger effort to create new and innovative dairy products and dairy ingredients to meet today's consumer needs. **CMN**