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The Future Of Dairy

Boost cheese sales with new flavors, new uses

Shoppers are looking for new experiences with things they know they like.

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Consumers are looking for new and exciting tastes, and cheese is well-suited to help consumers expand their palates, while allowing manufacturers and processors to create new eating occasions and drive sales. Consider the following:

- 75 percent of 18- to 34-year-olds purchase gourmet products, according to the Institute of Food Technologists' Top 10 Food Trends.
- Specialty food sales totaled \$70 billion in 2010 and grew 7 percent, according to the Allegiance Capital Corp.'s Specialty Food M&A Industry Snapshot.
- Gourmet cheese is the No. 1 item, also reported in Allegiance Capital Corp.'s Specialty Food M&A Industry Snapshot.

A strong point for the category is that shoppers are looking for new experiences with things they know they like. For cheese, this can mean incorporating extra-rare and selective ingredients, such as salmon, crab and truffles. Another option is using cheese as an ingredient in unexpected places, including ready-to-eat offerings and breads.

Additionally, the growth of at-home entertaining corresponds with the specialty cheese boom, and is another important consideration for processors looking to expand their specialty cheese options. Key stats are:

- Today, 40 percent of consumers say they are entertaining at home more frequently, according to GfK Roper Reports.
- One-third of consumers buy specialty foods for their guests, GfK Roper also reports.

- Twenty percent feel it is worth paying more for gourmet snacks when entertaining, as stated in the Institute of Food Technologists' Top 10 Food Trends.

The above insights came from the Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy Future of Dairy research; you can learn more about these and other opportunities by scheduling a meeting with an Innovation Center expert (email futureofdairy@usdairy.com). In the meantime, here are a few idea starters to capitalize on consumers' increased appetite for specialty foods:

- Provide aged cheese paired with wine or craft beer tastings at retail.
- Formulate rustic pizzas with exotic cheeses twisted into the crust.
- Partner with other craft and artisan categories for sampling events or product development.

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