

Oceans of innovation

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An abundance of branded and commodity seafood, from domestic and international suppliers, ensures that retailers' seafood cases will be stocked.

A record haul of exhibitors and attendees at this spring's Seafood Expo North America and Seafood Processing North America convention in Boston should lead to supermarket seafood cases swimming with innovative new products, new species and creative merchandising ideas.

Innovation is being witnessed across a broad range of fresh, frozen and processed product. Even the traditional stuffed clam is getting a makeover.

"Our trademark product has been our Matlaw's New England Style stuffed clam, which is a top-seller nationwide and is the number-one seafood appetizer in the U.S., but we are bringing innovation to it with three new flavors," says Nancy Peterson, vice president, marketing, National Fish & Seafood, the Gloucester, Mass.-based manufacturer of Matlaw's brand stuffed clams, scallops and crabs.



The new flavors are Bacon & Cheese-stuffed clams, Chorizo-stuffed clams and Chili Lime stuffed clams. "These flavors are designed to go after what is trending right now in food in terms of spicier, livelier flavors," Peterson says. "Bacon works terrific in a stuffed clam. It is just an awesome item."

Peterson recommends retailers stock Matlaw's products in a frozen seafood coffin case. "We find when the trays of stuffed clams are merchandised in a coffin case that the product just flies out because people see it as something special and are likely to give it a try," she says.

They may do the same thing with an Alaskan salmon fillet when it is cross-merchandised with a bottle of wine. Such a promotion is on tap thanks to a joint effort between the Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute (ASMI) and Chateau Ste. Michelle Wine Estates that kicks off in June and runs throughout the summer. The promotion will include bottle neckers, case stack displays, counter cards, recipe tear pads and a joint website with Chateau Ste. Michelle featuring how-to videos on grilling salmon.

"We did a similar promotion last year in 12,300 stores that was very successful for retailers, as well as for us," says Larry Andrews, retail marketing director, in ASMI's Seattle office. "We had Alaska keta salmon and sockeye salmon that we promoted."

This year's promotion features fresh and frozen fillets. "Chateau Ste. Michelle is truly involved with us as a partner and we work together to make for a better all-around experience for the consumer so that they know how to prepare the product with specific recipes and wine pairings," Andrews says. "It is a more involved program."

Last year about 217 million pink salmon were harvested, and many ended up getting canned. That is why this summer ASMI is promoting canned salmon as a healthy, nutrient-rich protein. "Promoting canned salmon is something that hasn't happened in a number of years," Andrews says. "We are doing freestanding inserts that are hitting cities where canned salmon is most popular. There is a coupon for any brand of Alaska salmon, which is stamped on the lid. We are promoting the 14 3/4-ounce 'falls' cans."

In addition to the FSI, ASMI is running ads in *Good Housekeeping*, *Prevention*, *Southern Living*, *Cooking With Paula Deen*, online banner ads and a family feature national press release with a targeted circulation goal of 20 million, Andrews says.

Salmon is usually sold as a commodity, but at least one processor is branding the popular fish. Cooke Aquaculture is marketing farm-raised Atlantic salmon under the True North Salmon brand name.

"The difference between True North Salmon versus any other salmon in the marketplace is the freshness of our product," says Andrew Lively, director of marketing, True North Salmon, a division of Cooke Aquaculture, based in Blacks Harbour, N.B., Canada. "The proximity of our product coming from the Gulf of Maine to the Northeastern and Central U.S. means that nobody can get salmon fresher and faster to the marketplace than we can. That is something the consumer is looking for, and from the retailer's perspective it means it has a longer shelf life because it gets to the store much quicker than anywhere else."

True North Salmon is easily tracked, Lively says, not only by the code number on the box, but also by DNA. "We are the only company in the world that has DNA traceable product, which means we can trace our salmon back to the hatchery that it came from just from its DNA," he says.

True North Salmon is being sold via 30-pound cases and the company provides branded window clings and ice picks, as well as tray pack products with the company logo that are weighed and priced at the store level.

"The consumer of Atlantic salmon is health conscious, generally female, with above average income and education, and is looking for healthy meal solutions," Lively says. "Since filleting a whole salmon is not high on their to-do lists, we sell the whole fillet with the pin bones out, steaks and pre-portioned 5-, 6- and 7-ounce exact weight portions that the retailer can sell by the piece."

Other brand names are finding a home in the seafood case. Best known for its canned tuna, Bumble Bee, for example, introduced a line of frozen seafood entrées last year.

"Bumble Bee has spent quite a bit of time over the last couple of years focusing on innovation and we are happy to introduce our new line of frozen value tilapia, salmon and shrimp entrées under the Bumble Bee Superfresh brand," says David Melbourne Jr., senior vice president, consumer marketing and corporate social responsibility, for Bumble Bee Foods, based in San Diego.

One of Bumble Bee's newest acquisitions is Anova Food, a supplier of high-quality sashimi grade tunas to sushi bars and fine restaurants.

"Anova will have some tremendous retail applications as we move forward," Melbourne says. "It serves a very interesting need, both within the foodservice arena, and also when you look at retail applications. It really allows us to take innovation to another level."

Fishing for value

Astute retailers need to investigate which species offer the best value and then communicate that message to their shoppers, suppliers say.

“Pacific whiting is a great opportunity right now to put into retail,” says Sean Carroll, domestic sales manager, for Pacific Seafood, based in Clackamas, Ore. “We’ve made some significant investments in British Columbia on Pacific rockfish, and that is another huge opportunity in both fresh and frozen.” Pacific recently introduced a new bagged fillet line of Snow Mist Brand Pacific Rockfish.

Historically, Pacific Seafood was strong in the commodity side of the business, but in recent years has been building its value-added branded product, company officials say. “The retail products give us a chance to showcase our brand in the market, which is our strength,” Carroll says. The company’s current brands are Pacific Seafood and Newport.

Canned Alaskan sockeye salmon belly is viewed as a delicacy in Europe, the U.K. and Australia and is gaining ground in the U.S., according to officials with North Pacific Seafoods, which manufactures the product for private and controlled labels. “This is the belly portion of the loin and has about double the oil of regular salmon and double the omega-3, so it is very heart-healthy,” says Slim Jorgensen, canned product manager, at Seattle-based North Pacific Seafoods. “As far as healthy eating, this is about the best that you can get for salmon.”

Caviar is another seafood item often packaged in tins. Although still largely imported, domestic caviar is increasingly gaining popularity with consumers and caviar connoisseurs. About six years ago Fish Breeders of Idaho began producing farm-raised Idaho sturgeon caviar. “That first year I was limited to about 300 pounds. I’ll have about 3,000 pounds this year,” says Leo E. Ray, president of the Hagerman, Idaho-based company.

“The beluga is considered the best of all the caviar,” Ray says. “The white sturgeon is the second largest and is considered the closest thing to the beluga, and that is what we’re raising.”

According to Ray, the white sturgeon is also raised for its meat, which is becoming more popular in the restaurant channel. “It is very similar to halibut,” he says. “When halibut got very expensive a few years ago a lot of restaurants took halibut off the menu and put sturgeon on in its place.”

Changes are in store for Louisiana seafood, now that the marketing agency promoting the product has transitioned from being aligned with the department of wildlife and fisheries to the department of culture, recreation and tourism. “This is a good fit for us because our food is so much a part of our culture that you can’t separate the two,” says Karen Profita, executive director of the Louisiana Seafood Promotion and Marketing Board, based in New Orleans.

“We’re trying to build off of that in areas of the country that we know have a love for Louisiana food and culture, including the Northeast, Texas and Chicago,” Profita says. “We’re also looking at how we can work more with the industry. If they are carrying our product, can we come in and help with couponing, advertising, promotion or anything that can make it more successful for them?”

Look for some of Louisiana’s more unusual species to be making their way into the seafood case. “Black drum is just a fabulous fish that hasn’t been marketed that strongly,” Profita says. “Sheep’s head is a fish with a meat that is very similar to crab.”

Consumers can use an app on Apple or Android devices to find Gulf seafood product at their local retailer, restaurant or wholesaler, says Joanne McNeely Zaritsky, marketing director, Gulf Seafood Marketing Coalition (GSMC), at the Gulf & South Atlantic Fisheries Foundation, based in Tallahassee, Fla. The app covers five states—Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas.

GSMC is also looking to do more retail partnerships.

“We did a partnership with Hannaford on shrimp and had wonderful results with that,” McNeely Zaritsky says. “We did a program last year with Rouses and saw a 14% increase in shrimp sales. We are about to start a program with WinCo.”

Retailers should expect to see more seafood from Indonesia filling their cases as well. The Asian island nation produces 15 million tons of seafood a year and is the world’s second largest producer after China, according to Saut P. Hutagalung, director general, of the Republic of Indonesia Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries in Jakarta.

“The U.S. is our most important export market, taking about 35% of our export,” he says. “That is a value of about \$1.5 billion. Our primary exports to the U.S. are shrimp and tuna, followed by crabmeat, tilapia and snapper. About 80% of the imported crab sold in the U.S. is from Indonesia.”

Hutagalung adds that Indonesia is working on improving its sustainability and food safety. “Our premium-quality tilapia is certified by ASC—Aquaculture Stewardship Council. Our exporters have good contact with the U.S. importers, with some having relationships going back more than 15 years,” he says.

Seafood imported from Morocco is also becoming more plentiful. A first-time Moroccan pavilion at the Seafood Expo showcased the products from 14 Moroccan fisheries. The nation’s goal is to increase its worldwide seafood exports from \$1.7 billion today to \$3.1 billion by 2020. However, the country currently exports 68% of its seafood production to Europe and only 2% to the U.S., say Moroccan officials.

“Exporting to the U.S. market is a very important way to diversify its exports for Morocco,” says Nadia Rhaouti, sectorial manager, Maroc Export, based in Casablanca, Morocco.

Swordfish, octopus and marinated anchovies are among the key products exported from Morocco to the U.S. “Most of the exports are frozen products, sent by cargo, but we also have a demand on fresh products that are sent to New York and Montreal by plane,” Rhaouti says.

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