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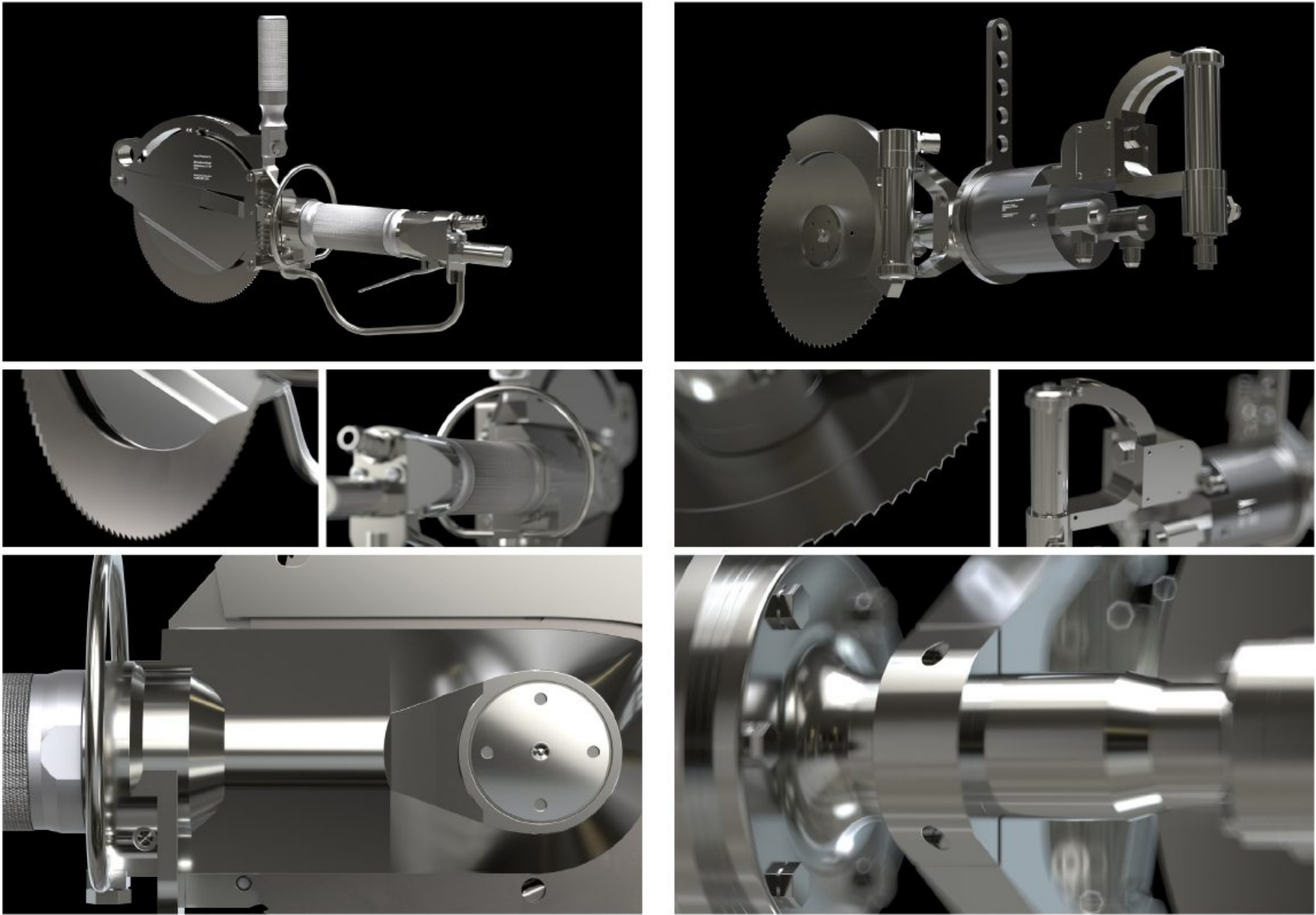
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SPECIAL REPORT PLANT-BASED MEATS

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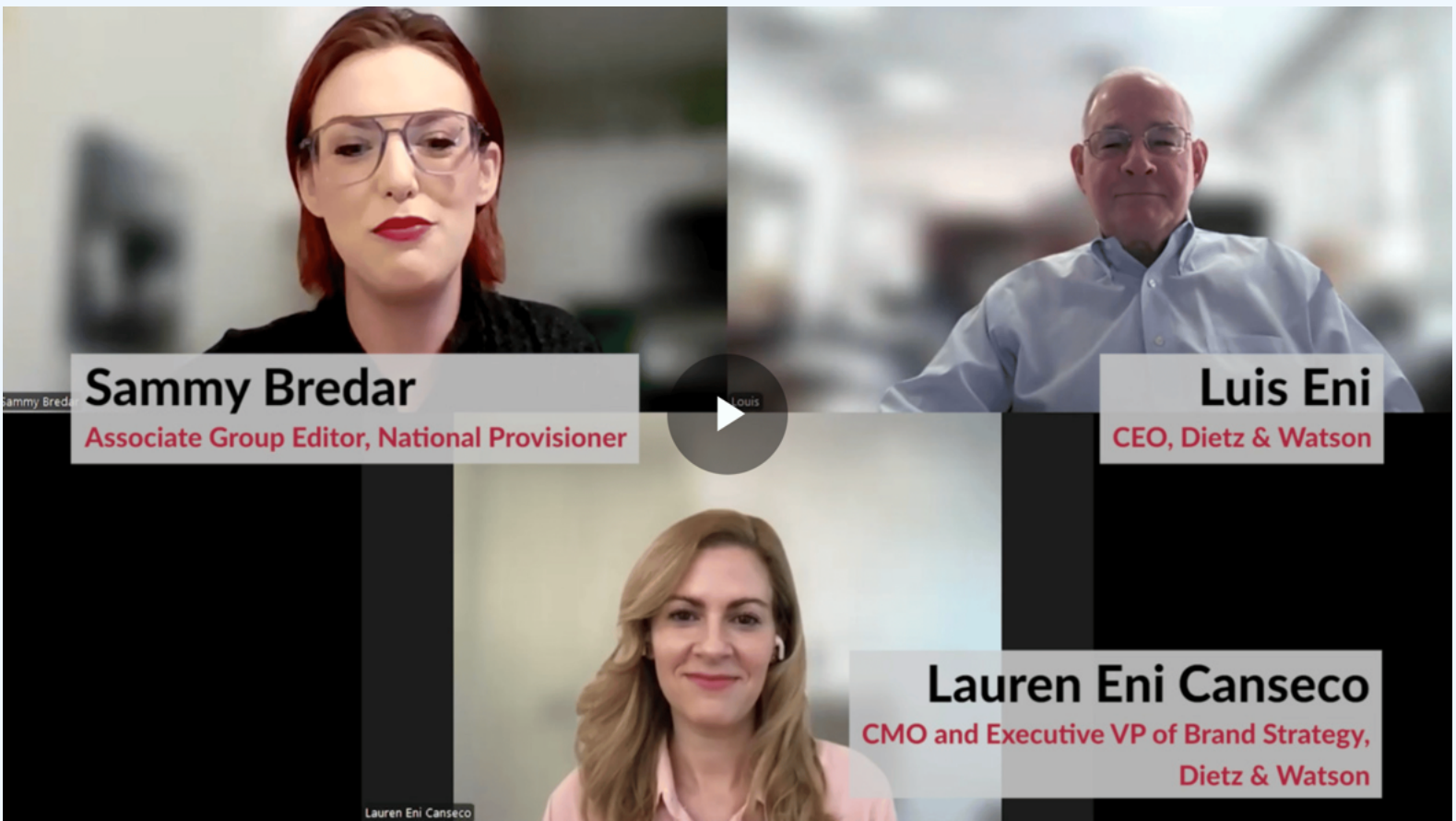


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Let's put beef, pork and poultry back at the center of the plates of every American, not beans, peas and lentils.

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ROOM TO GROW FOR PLANT-BASED MEATS

Plant-based meats get a lot of attention across consumer and b-to-b food media – but it’s another story in the grocery aisles.

According to retail sales data from Circana, the combination of refrigerated and frozen plant-based meat alternatives generated \$74.1 million in February 2025, reflecting double-digit decreases in dollars, units and volume. That follows several months of single-digit declines in late 2024.

While sales in the category may be cooling off, product innovation continues to heat up, including for deli and foodservice products. See our Plant-Based Meats Report 2025 are learn what’s trending.

The Power of Meat 2025 study finds that animal welfare’s influence on meat purchases is likely to rise, with 16% of consumers saying they think about it and it greatly influences their purchases. Check out our Special Report: Animal Welfare & Humane Handling for some insights from Jennifer Walker, co-founder and chief animal welfare officer for Kinder Ground, a nonprofit organization dedicated to elevating the welfare of animals in food production. She shares some insights on emerging issues and trends regarding the industry’s animal welfare practices and priorities.

And don’t miss our Independent Processor Profile of Fra’ Mani, a salumi company founded by a lawyer and a James Beard Award-winning chef that helps foodservice and retail customers elevate deli selections.



FRED WILKINSON

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Opening image courtesy: Prime Roots

EMAIL FRED WILKINSON

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BY FRED WILKINSON
CHIEF EDITOR

Combined sales of refrigerated and frozen plant-based meat alternatives generated \$74.1 million in February 2025, a double-digit decrease in dollars, units and volume coming after several months of single-digit declines, according to Circana retail sales analysis.

Sales for refrigerated plant-based meat alternatives found in the meat case or produce department fell 20.8% during February 2025 compared to February 2024.

Combined with average number of refrigerated plant-based meat alternatives per store declining 14.8% year-on-year, Circana analysis suggests this may point to a reduction in assortment that is affecting year-over-year sales levels.

Moving this category back to growth looks like an uphill battle, but Shanda Franzen, Cargill marketing manager, alternative protein, says the manufacturer is focusing on delivering on taste, texture, nutrition and value to lure consumers into giving plant-based meat products a second try.

“In the rush to develop new products, not all first-generation entries met consumers’ standards,” Franzen said. “We heard that and recognized the industry needed to do a better job meeting consumers’ expectations around things like taste, texture, aroma, nutrition and value.”



Plant-based meat innovations
with Kimberlie Le of Prime Roots



Kimberlie Le is co-founder and CEO of plant-based meats marketer Prime Roots. In this interview, she discusses the company's lineup of deli-focused plant-based meat products.

PLAY >>

Cargill set out to make these products more attractive to consumers.

“Recently, we did a product cutting comparing our first-wave products to some of our recent formulations,” she said. “The difference in flavor, texture and juiciness was remarkable. The products we are making today are so much better than those of just a few years ago. They taste meatier, with savory and umami flavors that come through in every bite. We’ve made significant gains on the texture side, too. The ‘chew down’ is much closer to traditional animal meat. A big reason for the gains is that today’s ingredients and flavor systems were developed specifically for alt-meat products. As a result, we’re able to provide consumers with a better overall eating experience.”

February 2025	Dollar sales	Change vs. 2024	Unit sales	Change vs. 2024	Volume (lbs) sales	Change vs. 2024
Plant-based meat alternatives fresh and frozen combined	\$74.1M	-14.3%	11.9M	-16.6%	9.1M	-18.6%

Source: Circana, Integrated Fresh, Total US, MULO+

Currently, much of the competition comes from within the plant-based category, Franzen said. However, as plant-based meat alternatives continue to improve in taste, texture, overall eating experience and value, they will increasingly compete with animal-based proteins.

“We anticipate a future where plant-based options go toe-to-toe with traditional meat products, with consumers making choices between the two categories based on their eating occasion needs,” she said, adding that consumers are seeking more protein options for health and satiety. “At the same time, they’re looking for variety and new ways to enjoy familiar foods. That’s where plant-based meat alternatives can play a key role, offering consumers another option alongside traditional choices like beef, poultry and seafood.”

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Cargill aims to be a leader in plant-based meats, Franzen said.

“We are uniquely positioned to achieve that goal,” she said. “We bring together deep animal protein and plant ingredient knowledge, and we’re the only supplier to span the full value chain, from ingredients to finished product manufacturing. That direct feedback loop helps us create better ingredients, because we can see where the gaps are and bring together cross-functional teams to tackle challenges head-on. Our knowledge, access to ingredients across the supply chain, expertise in animal proteins and capacity to produce finished products allows us to co-create new solutions aligned with consumers’ preferences and evolving needs.”

Franzen said foodservice has proven to be a great entry point for consumers to try plant-based meats.

“That’s because of the magic and sophistication of back-of-the-house culinary chefs, who are delivering exceptional flavors and eating experiences,” she said. “Restaurants are eager to experiment with these products, making them their own and introducing consumers to innovative – and delicious – plant-based meat alternatives.”



Photo courtesy of Prime Roots



Photo courtesy of Cargill

BALANCED APPROACH

Food System Innovations believes there is a plant-based proteins growth opportunity for the meat industry in: **balanced protein** — meat products that combine animal and plant-based ingredients.

Balanced proteins are meat products that preserve the taste of conventional meat while diversifying the nutritional profile and reducing environmental impact by replacing at least 30% of animal ingredients with alternative proteins or whole plant-based foods.

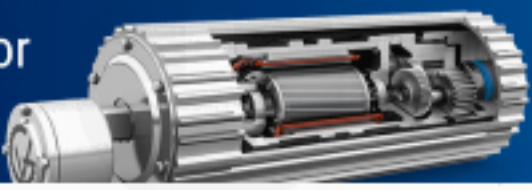
Food System Innovations says complementing traditional meat with plant-based ingredients has the potential to increase margins, diversify risky supply chains, and gain a foothold in new consumer groups and meat occasions — all while keeping meat at the center of the plate.

Opening image: Cargill



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PROCESSOR PROFILE

- Premium-Efficiency Electric Motor
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VIRGINIA BEEF PROCESSOR BRINGS PROFITS DIRECTLY TO FARMERS

LYNCHBURG, VA.-BASED SEVEN HILLS FOOD CO. POSITIONS FARMERS TO ACCESS UNTAPPED MARKETS.

BY SAMMY BREDAR
ASSOCIATE GROUP EDITOR

Now in its 10th year of operations, Virginia-based Seven Hills Food Co. is on a mission to make beef local and bring profits directly to farmers.

The full-service beef processor facilitates over 100 value-added product combinations for local family farms who process their cattle with them. They also wholesale of their own products under several different brands in Virginia, and even process cattle for producers that sell into Whole Foods branded programs. They sell their own Virginia Beef Co. brand in every Kroger and Harris Teeter in Virginia.

Ryan Ford, founder of Seven Hills Food Co., started a butcher shop in Charlottesville, Va., over a decade ago and saw a demand for local beef. He quickly realized the core issue in a local beef economy is the lack of commercially viable beef processing – as even his boutique butcher shop could not be consistently supplied by the average local beef processor, making growth impossible.

Ford found an abandoned 100-year-old beef plant and renovated it over several years. Their team began the daunting task of buying & processing local cattle, then selling their own branded products to restaurants, schools and retailers throughout Virginia.

Seven Hill’s pushed past extreme hardships since 2015, navigating startup woes and Covid-19 that wiped out most of their active customer base at the time. The Seven Hills business model has adapted over the years, now focusing on providing sophisticated processing services to local farmers that sell beef direct.

“Local farmers & finished cattle in Virginia never had access to the consumer market to this extent before we began this journey. Nearly all of the finished cattle have been getting sent to the Midwest or out of state”, said Dalton Mosser, president of Seven Hills Food Co.

OFTEN, FARMERS PAY THE COST TO THROW AWAY UNUSED PARTS OF THE CARCASS. SEVEN HILLS FOOD PARTNERS WITH SKINCARE, JERKY, SNACK STICK, DELI, DOG FOOD & LEATHER PROCESSORS TO HELP LOCAL FARMERS USE ALL PARTS OF THEIR OWN CATTLE, CREATING A SIGNIFICANT NEWFOUND MARGIN OPPORTUNITY.

With Seven Hills processing services & unique “no lead times” and farm delivery, Virginia farmers can process their cattle and sell their products, fulfilling local demand for their own regionally raised beef.

“Industry experts’ may laugh at our niche approach, but we do a lot more than simply turn local farmers cattle into steaks and ground beef” Mosser said. “My team is strategically positioning farmers selling direct to have unlimited access to the consumer market, but in a very unique way. I don’t think there is another beef processor like us that has created a fully functional model specifically designed for the small to mid-sized farmer to make more money.”

“Full carcass utilization is the goal of most processors, but we do it differently,” Mosser said. Farmers selling their beef direct typically miss out on hundreds or thousands of dollars in added value potential on each animal simply because they do not have access to retail grade, high-value products that use what the average processor may discard or grind. That’s where Seven Hills is stepping in.

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Often, farmers pay the cost to throw away unused parts of the carcass. Seven Hills Food partners with skincare, jerky, snack stick, deli, dog food and leather processors to help local farmers use all parts of their own cattle, creating a newfound margin opportunity. This value-added product family has greatly benefited the bottom line for Seven Hills’ partners.

As the health and wellness movement gains more traction, beef tallow is on the rise. For example, rather than wasting it, farmers can reach new markets through their own branded skincare products to increase their bottom line. “Farmers can sign up for that service with us and profit and extra \$1,000 or more per head, IF they can find the right market to sell it in,” Mosser said. “Anyone can stuff these products in a box and call it a day, but we also function as a marketing service for farmers. We literally have full time staff dedicated to pristine custom packaging, labeling, branding & barcoding of these products FOR the farmers, which allows them to walk into a supermarket and have the look and feel needed to compete at the highest level – for over one hundred different products.”

Seven Hills sets itself apart in the beef processing community with this suite of value-added services to its farmers. “I think people across the country may look at Seven Hills’ model and say, ‘wow, for a regional beef processor, they’ve figured out how to work with in harmony with the farming community instead of being at odds or having friction,’ and that’s what we’re excited to get out there,” Mosser said. “We’ve can give an entire farming region access to more of the consumer dollar than ever before.”

“We intentionally built this model for local farmers. We want them to make more money, so that in turn they bring us more cattle to process, and that’s how we make money,” Mosser said. “It’s a full-circle pass through, where the retail dollars are captured at the farmers level, before it comes to us.”

In July 2024, the US Department of Agriculture announced it has awarded \$26.9 million to 33 projects in 23 states through the Local Meat Capacity grant program in an effort to expand processing within the meat and poultry industry. Seven Hills Food received one of USDA’s MCap grants.

MCap’s \$1.6 million grant enabled the Virginia-based retailer and processing facility to make plant enhancements, grow production capacity, add rendering capacity, new value-added products as well as a farmer liason to coordinate expanded beef processing services.

“Now that we’re here and have this grant, we’re investing that money into new equipment that increases our production capacity drastically,” Mosser said. “And that’s going to reshape the beef industry for Virginia and surrounding region.”

All image credits: Seven Hills

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CAN'T BE SHY ABOUT TELLING ITS STORY

KINDER GROUND CHIEF ANIMAL WELFARE OFFICER JENNIFER WALKER SHARES INSIGHTS ON EMERGING ISSUES AND TRENDS REGARDING THE INDUSTRY'S ANIMAL WELFARE PRACTICES AND PRIORITIES.

BY FRED WILKINSON
CHIEF EDITOR

According to the [Power of Meat 2025](#) study, nearly half (49%) of Americans say “yes” when asked if they think animals are raised in a humane way. More than a quarter (26%) answer “no” to that question with the remaining 24% saying they “don’t know.”

That suggests a solid level of consumer trust in the safety of meat and poultry products – but also the need to continue outreach and education.

Jennifer Walker is co-founder and chief animal welfare officer for Kinder Ground, a nonprofit organization dedicated to elevating the welfare of animals in food production. She shares some insights on emerging issues and trends regarding the industry's animal welfare practices and priorities.

Study findings presented during ProteinPACT 2024 last fall suggest 20% of consumers report being active detractors of the meat and poultry industry when it comes to animal welfare issues – what approach can help engage and inform consumers in this area?

Jennifer Walker: I think the first thing the industries need to do is stop asking people who will NEVER like/approve/support their product what they think. Of the 20% that report being active detractors of meat and poultry, 6% are vegetarian or vegan. The overall percentage of the population that adheres to a vegetarian diet has not changed in any huge significant way over time. The chance of changing their purchasing behavior for whatever reason they chose to not purchase animal products is approaching zero. Stop trying to convince them. In the words of Miss Swift, “haters gonna hate.” If 15% are active detractors, that means you have 85% of the population that are willing consumers. Yay! If you genuinely think the 15% are “activists” or, whom I think we should more accurately refer to as animal agriculture abolitionists, I think it is wrong-headed to say that these are the folks “we need to work on”.

I think the bigger question and concern is why do only 10% “actively support the industry when it comes to animal welfare”? Having not seen the actual study I don’t know what that means exactly, but let’s take it to mean only 10% think the industry is doing a great job when it comes to animal welfare. If we ignore the 6%, that means that 84% of our consumers do not feel we meet the moment when it comes to animal welfare. If we disregard the full 20% that leaves us with 70% thinking we don’t do a bang-up job. That is a problem, but I don’t think it is a surprise. Maybe it is because we are not collectively showing up as advocates for the animals in our systems like we should? If the industry thinks we are going to message our way out of the problem, whether it is tie-stalls, gestation crates, battery cages or feedlots that offer zero shade as relief from sweltering sun, we are kidding ourselves. We have been having the same tired conversation for 20 years and guess what, 94% of consumer think it is OK to benefit from animals in production and 84% of those think we could do better at treating them a little better, and they are right. If you want to engage consumers, show them something worth engaging over instead of trying to convince them that what they intuitively understand to be a less than optimal situation is actually a good one. Step one to building trust is being honest. Show consumers what you are doing to do better rather than trying to do better at explaining why you continue to do what you have always done.



Credit: t-lorien / Getty Images

What emerging regulatory guidance is impacting animal welfare and humane handling?

Jennifer Walker: I am not on the plant and processing side, so I won't touch on that. I don't know of any specific regulatory guidance at the moment on the farm side, and don't imagine there will be much appetite or steam on that for the next several years. Nevertheless, I do think the transport of animals, specifically calves, is going to come under increased scrutiny along with calf housing. Canada has established some specific rules as has the EU around minimum age for transport and maximum time for travel. Few things scream "I couldn't care less" than putting a day-old calf on a trailer and sending it half-way across the country to then be raised in a pen barely big enough to turn around in, on slatted floors with no bedding -- and the latest undercover video from an animal ag abolitionist group manages to shine a spotlight on the issue.

How is the threat of HPAI influencing animal welfare and humane handling practices and consumer-facing messaging? US or other regions?

Jennifer Walker: I think the big issues is, it is going to ensure that the topic of mass depopulation stays on the radar and continual risk when it comes to consumer sentiment. Until we identify humane, or at least more humane ways to manage depopulation the reality is we are being forced to kill millions of birds in a way that is not humane. It may be the best we can do today, but that should not keep us from working hard to do better, not just for the animals but for the caregivers that have to manage it. That includes putting the welfare of the birds over profit and moving beyond the politics and trade barriers that are keeping us from vaccinating the birds. Again, you can't message "how much you care" and then turn around and say we are not going to protect our birds because it will impact our export market.

A it relates to handling and transport, I think the impact of HPAI in cattle has revealed to many the degree and distance to which some cattle are moved as part of their normal operations drawing attention the stress of transport, particularly with newborns.

Lastly, I think there is a real risk of losing trust when it comes to food safety due to the repeated issues of raw diets and raw milk causing mortalities in domestic and wild cats.

How are AI and other tech innovations shaping humane handling and animal welfare practices and outcomes? Assume I can speak to AI and tech available globally? Yes

Jennifer Walker: There is a lot of tech out there. Beyond the systems out of Deloitte monitoring handling at slaughter, I don't see many that are ready for prime time and or scalable at the farm level. There are some systems to score locomotion in cattle that perform OK, but the platforms are not enough. You need boots on the ground to support their role out and adoption on the farm, and you need the caregivers on the farm capable and empowered to act on the data.

I am both bullish and bearish on technology and AI when it comes to animal welfare. That is, I am an optimist who worries a lot! In theory these tools will help us intelligently manage data, ensure animals are treated as individuals and receive timely care, provide constant monitoring of the animals and their environment, allow us the opportunity to micromanage the environment in ways that can protect the environment and soil health, and offer 24/7 vigilance of the animals and their caregivers. My concern is the reality will be that data is leveraged to maximize profit not optimize it with welfare, we will manage to the average, not the individual, access to tech will be limited by scale to farms that can afford it and adapt their system to it, it will replace rather than elevate caregivers, and at its very worst, it will erode competence and empathy. The intuition of our caregivers will be replaced by notifications. Empathy will be undermined by data. And a duty of care will be dismissed by digital vigilance.

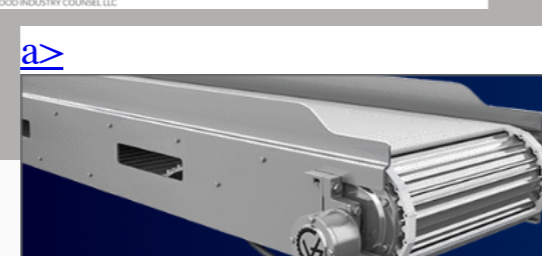
The one exception I see is the ability to use AI and tech to build empathy. The Animal Vision system that allows us to train animal caregivers on stockmanship provides a unique opportunity to use technology to build empathy. The Humane Handling Institute at the University of Wisconsin RF is investing in this technology and will incorporate it into teaching stockmanship. The ability to give caregivers the chance to see and experience the world through the eyes of cattle I believe will transform how we work with cattle day to day as well as open our eyes to how we can make simple fixes in their everyday environment that will make their lives and ours a little better.

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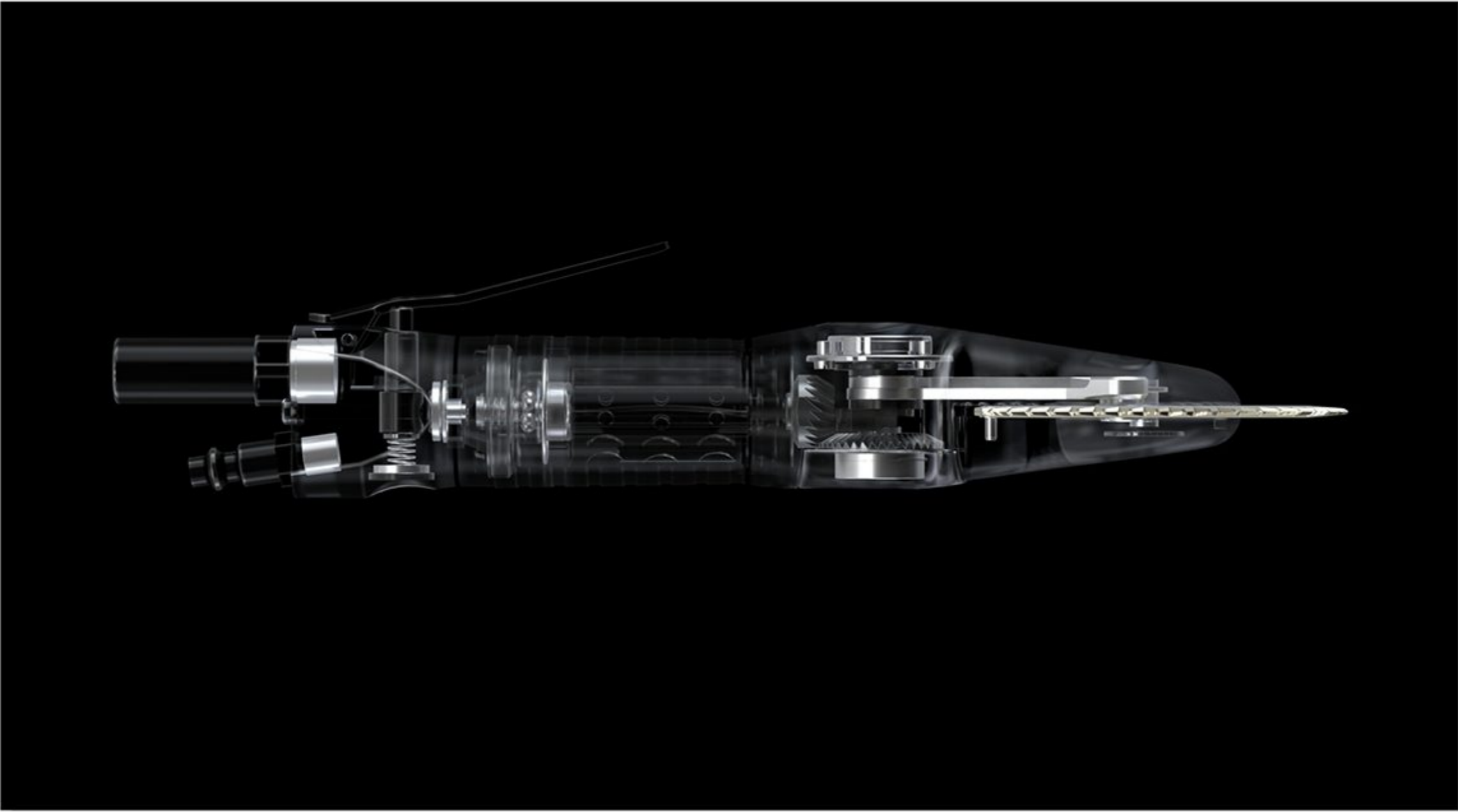
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BY SHAWN K. STEVENS
FOOD INDUSTRY COUNSEL LLC

The first, in my opinion, is to achieve a very mature level of comfort with your supply chain. It is no longer feasible (or advisable) to merely select suppliers based upon cost. Indeed, food safety history has taught us time and time again that, when food companies overlook food safety or quality concerns to enhance cost-savings, they eventually find themselves facing a seemingly insurmountable crisis. A close colleague once told me that any company can avoid a million-dollar exposure tomorrow by spending an extra \$100,000 on better ingredients or interventions today. Indeed, paying a premium for a product that is produced within an organization with a strong food safety culture and tighter food safety and quality controls can and will pay substantial dividends over time.

So, as we enter a new year with a new presidential administration that is shaking up the federal government, it might be a good imperious to “shake up” your own organization. Demand that you do business with only the best suppliers, make sure you have solid contracts with each, and ensure that you are adequately insured. By doing so, and investing a small amount of resources today, can and will likely save you an unlimited amount of resources in the future.

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PROCESSOR PROFILE - FRA' MANI



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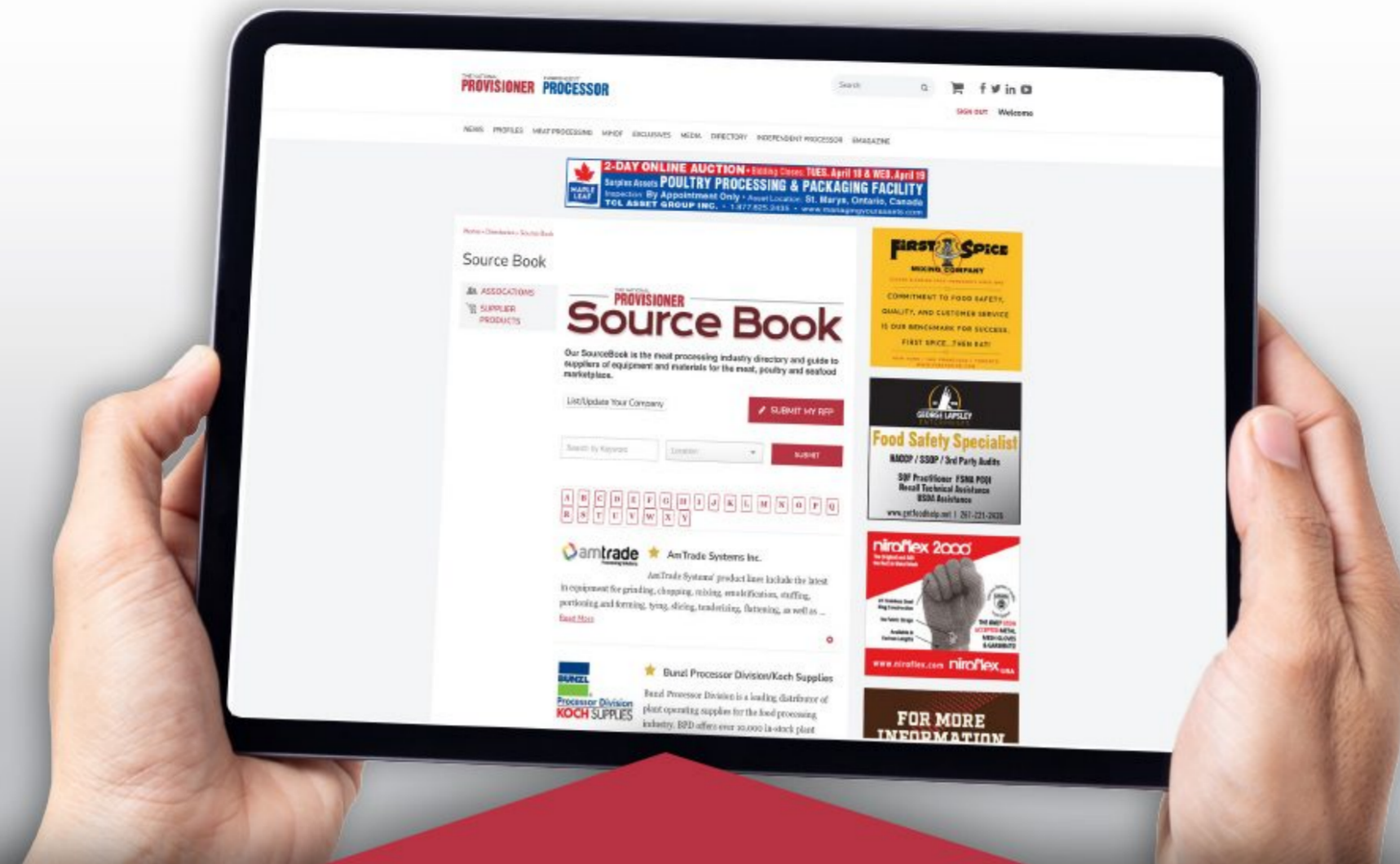
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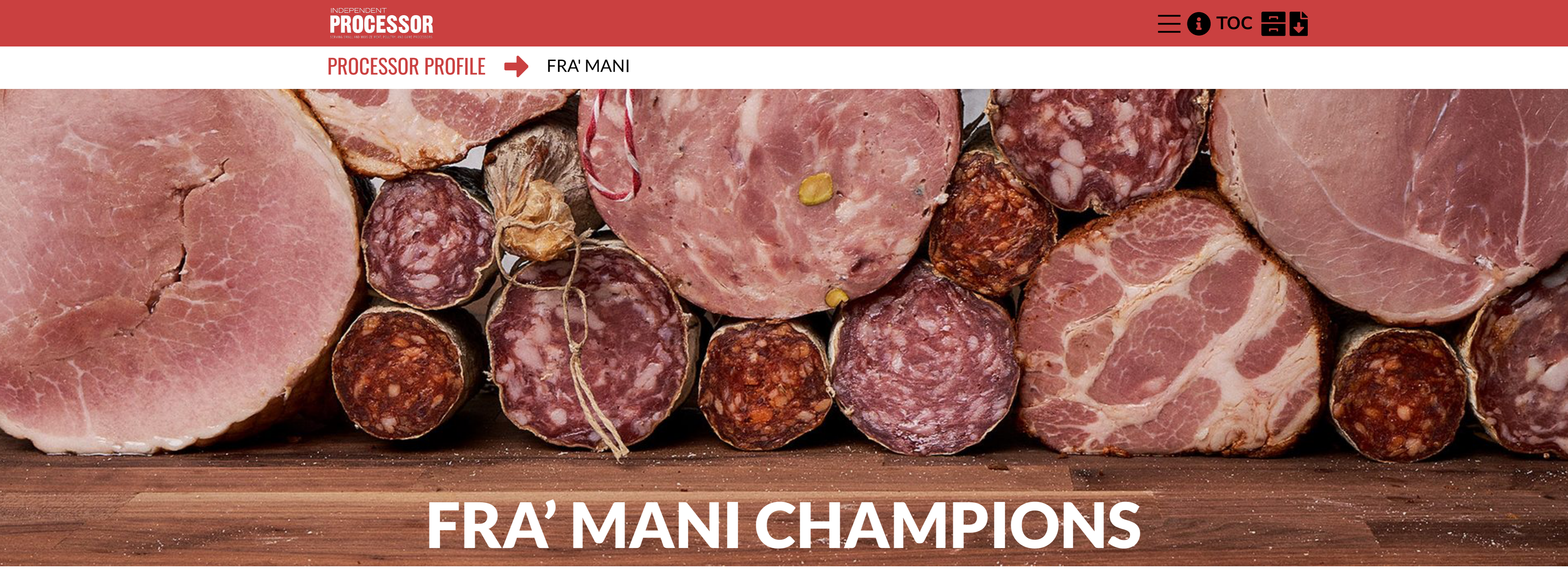
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FRA’ MANI CHAMPIONS TRADITIONAL CULINARY METHODS

LAWYER AND JAMES BEARD AWARD-WINNING CHEF TEAM UP TO FORM A SALUMI COMPANY.

BY SAMMY BREDAR
ASSOCIATE GROUP EDITOR

Americans love deli meats, but they have been craving something more than your average cold cuts. [Fra' Mani](#) entered the scene in 2006 to help foodservice and retail customers elevate their deli selections with traditional, chef-driven products. The California-based company was founded by Paul Bertolli, a James Beard Award-winning chef and author of the cookbook “Cooking by Hand,” and Tom Garrity, who was a lawyer before joining the meat industry.

Fra’Mani sells salami, cooked salumi and smoked sausages sourced from family farms that are committed to sustainable production practices. Though Fra’ Mani officially launched in 2006, the idea for the company truly began much earlier, said Fra’ Mani Head of Brand Jason Sullivan.

“Paul’s grandfather was a master salumiere and Paul was a union butcher in his teens,” Sullivan said. “He’s had a salami cellar in his home for almost 30 years and it’s always been a passion.”

Once Bertolli saw strong, increasing demand for his salumi, he decided to turn his salumi-making skills into a profession. Bertolli met Garrity in college at this time, who was looking for something new, and the two joined forces to create their own company.

“But it wasn’t just any salumi company. It was a different type of company utilizing different methods...traditional Italian methods... where the quality and taste were like no other and their commitment to the land and environment were like no other,” Sullivan said.

Animal welfare and husbandry are top priorities for Fra’ Mani. Sullivan said the company sources the top 1-2% highest-grade pigs from small family farms. All Fra’ Mani products are free from nitrates, accelerants, antibiotics, artificial growth hormones and meat by-products.

The company maintains a chef-driven mindset in its entire product line, which Sullivan said incorporates balance, technique and patience together to craft offerings that highlight the meat, rather than mask it. A large aspect of the chef-driven mindset is time. “We don’t choose the easy way out,” Sullivan said. “Time plays an important role in what makes something excellent vs. good. For us, the right amount of time is nonnegotiable.”



Paul and Tom, Fra’ Mani founders

The chef-driven mindset aligns with the company’s emphasis on animal welfare and husbandry. “At the highest level, we promote and protect what’s good for the land animals, and people as an ecosystem,” Sullivan said. “And that naturally dovetails into taking a chef-driven approach to the making. It starts with sourcing the best possible ingredients. We choose from the top 2% available in North America – family farms, hogs raised right, no antibiotics.”

“We then treat it like a chef vs. a meat company—the right cuts, treated the right way; nuance and balanced seasoning so that the meat is hero; time-consuming methods to ensure optimum flavor and texture,” he said.

The name Fra’ Mani translates to “between or among hands,” honoring the company’s chef-driven mindset and the tradition of sharing a high-quality meal, Sullivan noted.



Fra’ Mani products

Fra’ Mani has won various awards over the years, including 12 Good Food awards, four sofs and many other international prizes. In 2023 alone, Fra’ Mani won five medals – more than any other American or Italian producer – at the World Charcuterie Awards in London, including a Best in Class – Salami for their Toscano, which also won a Gold Medal. Last year the company introduced their first Guanciale, which has been a great success with chef customers.

“We’re always looking at ways to grow the brand and business in the right way that feels true to who we are,” Sullivan said. “We’re creative at our core and respect tradition at the same time.”

Photos courtesy of Fra’ Mani

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ENGAGE AND EDUCATE

HIGHLY ENGAGED E-COMMERCE SHOPPERS SPEND THREE TIMES ON MEAT AND DELI COMPARED TO IN-STORE ONLY SHOPPERS.

BY FRED WILKINSON
CHIEF EDITOR

For both e-commerce and in-store purchase occasions, educating customers can help smaller processors level up sales and solidify brand loyalty for existing customers.

“Digital penetration continues to grow for meat and poultry products, so digital merchandising should continue to grow in focus for these categories as well,” said Melissa Lobaugh, insights account director for [market research firm 84.51°](#). Lobaugh said almost half of shoppers who purchase grocery items both in-store and online (omnichannel shoppers) expect everything to be the same in-store and online – including merchandising components like assortment and price.

“Many meat categories are growing digital penetration, which is the percent of dollars spent on pickup and delivery,” she said. “Highly engaged e-commerce shoppers spend three times on meat and deli compared to in-store only shoppers, so it is important to cultivate your brands with e-commerce shoppers. Digital strategies should be a focus for marketers of all sizes. Also, with digital activation, small marketers can make the most of their marketing dollars with more precise targeting and higher ROI tactics.”

Shoppers want to see a variety of sizes and price offerings to meet their household size and budget online, especially in meat categories vs. the more standard size and price assortment often seen in these categories online, she said.

To reach in-store customers, signage is great way to engage and educate shoppers, said Good Meat Project Executive Director [Michele Thorne](#). The Good Meat Project, is a national nonprofit that supports marketplace innovation, connection and education across the meat supply chain to strengthen the [economic viability](#) of livestock producers that invest in sustainable production practices and animal welfare.

Thorne said the Good Meat Project offers consumer-focused educational resources such as its Bulk Meat Buying Guides to help educate consumers who are purchasing bulk meat directly from the producer.

“GMP's Good Meat Guide to Bulk Buying Beef will help your customers navigate the sometimes confusing ins and outs of buying whole or half meat shares from farmers and ranchers,” she said. “This toolkit includes simply designed graphics that cover common cuts and average amounts of each cut, carcass weight vs. edible meat yield and freezer space. There are also toolkits for buying bulk pork as well as for lamb and goat.”

Thorne said Good Meat Project' free consumer educational resources include the Lowdown on Cuts, Buying from Butchers and Basic Butcher Terminology.

“You can also share resources that help customers understand differences between tough and tender cuts so they can properly prepare and enjoy the meat they purchase from you,” she said.

Small processors marketing direct to consumers can leverage cross-promotional opportunities too, Lobaugh said.

“From an analytic perspective, convenient meals is the meat subcategory most often purchased in the same basket as meat snacks,” she said. “They have a strong relationship and cross-promotion potential. Marketers across meat, deli, poultry, meat snacks nuts and other grab-and-go proteins should complete similar analyses across their products to find brands and items shoppers are most often purchasing in the same basket. This will ensure that cross-promotional activations contain relevant products that households buy as complementary.”

Lobaugh said 81% of omnichannel shoppers prefer to buy frozen foods online vs. in-store.

“Couple that insight with the fact that 86% of shoppers cite convenience as the reason they shop online for grocery items,” she said. “Both of these factors have increased over the last three years, so consumers have higher expectations for items that save time and drive convenience.”

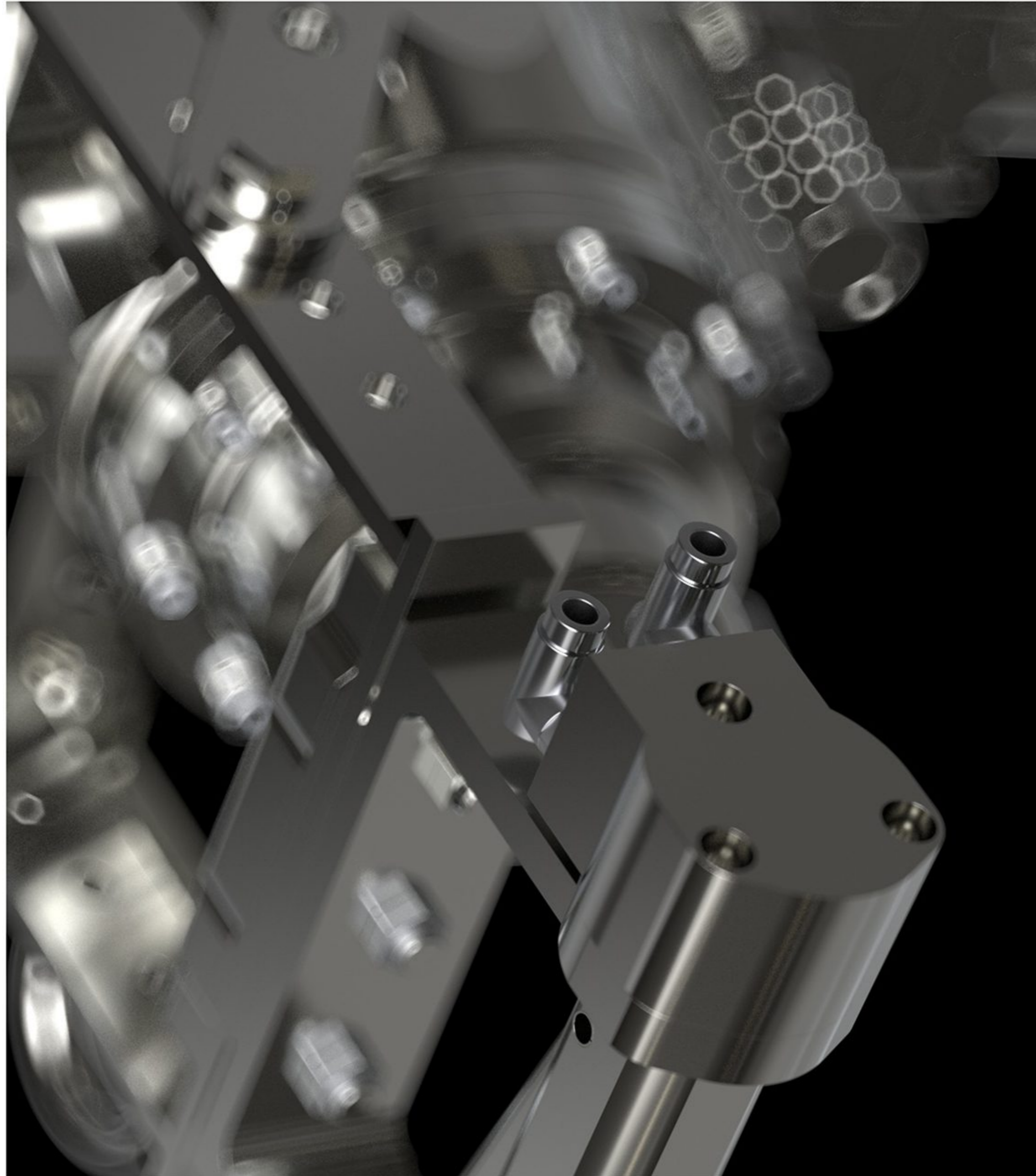
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EXPANSION OF THE TRADITIONAL GRILLING SEASON BRINGS WINS FOR THE MEAT DEPARTMENT.

BY SAMMY BREDAR
ASSOCIATE GROUP EDITOR

Though grilling season typically runs from Memorial Day through Labor Day, Americans are now grilling in every season, both indoors and outdoors. As grilling becomes more popular, retail and foodservice meat products must keep pace with consumers’ growing creativity in the kitchen.

Traditional grilling season brings the meat department strong sales every year. “Grilling is one of the best occasions for the meat department to drive additional sales and you can see it in the numbers,” said Anne-Marie Roerink, principal for 210 Analytics. “Ground beef had the highest dollar gains of the 85,000 products measured in the Circana MULO+ universe across center-store and perishable items. Grilling plays a big role in that.”

Roerink noted that the biggest opportunity for grilling is the expansion of the traditional grilling season. “America has invested big time in grills and smokers and these appliances are used year-round, especially in the Southern states where weather provides opportunity year-round,” she said. “In the Northern states, indoor grills have certainly made inroads as well as consumers continue to entertain and celebrate at home more often than they did a few years ago.”





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As food costs remain high at retail and foodservice, more consumers are opting to cook at home, leading them to fine-tune their culinary skills. This rise in at-home cooking is turning the kitchen into an avenue for community building and entertainment.

“We continue to see new people enter the category, drawn by the versatility, fun, food, and moments of connection that are unique to grilling,” said Mike Jacobs, president for Weber LLC. “Seasoned outdoor cooking enthusiasts are expanding their setups, adding new products and accessories to enhance their experience.”

Consumers are getting creative in the kitchen, especially when it comes to ingredients and flavor combinations and blends. “Convenience and culinary-inspired offerings are driving innovation in the grilling category,” said Kirstyn Lipson, senior director of marketing for Verde Farms. “Consumers want conveniently packaged, pre-seasoned, marinated, or pre-sliced grilling options that reduce prep time while delivering bold, high-quality flavors.”

As the health and wellness movement rapidly gains popularity among many consumers, there is stronger demand for plant-based protein, as well as seafood products, since these proteins are traditionally viewed as more nutritional products. As more consumers look for traditionally health-focused protein products, they are searching for new ways to cook these proteins as well.

“Plant-based grilling has become particularly popular, with customers experimenting with veggie burgers, marinated tofu, and even hearty vegetables like cauliflower steaks,” Jacobs said. “Seafood is also a go-to choice for those looking for leaner protein options, with grilled salmon, shrimp, and even whole fish becoming more common on the grill.” Jacobs noted that evolving dietary norms are sparking new pathways of innovation for Weber.



According to Research and Markets, the health and wellness movement is driving consumer interest in grilling because it allows excess fats to drip away, making it more appealing to consumers who are looking to reduce their fat intake. [Research and Markets' United States Barbecue Grill Market Report 2025](#) indicated that grills featuring precise heat control or grease management systems are on the rise.

Creative and global flavor combinations are increasingly trending with consumers. Lipson said that the grilling category is being shaped by both international flavors and smoky seasonings with bold flavor. “We’re seeing increased demand for Latin-inspired flavors (carne asada-style marinades) and smoky/spicy profiles (chipotle, harissa, black garlic),” she said.

Roerink noted that the sausage and burger categories are strong examples of flavor innovation driving growth. “From candy corn brats to kimchi burgers, there are so many trends to play into,” she said. “Korean barbecue is extremely popular in restaurant foodservice and is a flavor that can certainly be replicated for at-home grilling occasions whether indoors or outdoors.”

US consumers use many types of grills for outdoor cooking, but gas grilling is the most popular. “In the United States, gas grilling leads other fuel types in its broad popularity,” said Jacobs. “Gas grilling is valued for its convenience, ease of use, and precise temperature control—perfect for quick and consistent delicious results.”

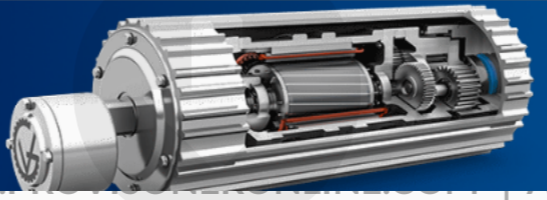
Despite the enduring popularity of gas grilling, many consumers prefer charcoal grilling for its high heat for searing and ability to create smoky, authentic flavor.

In addition to the more traditional grilling equipment, Weber is seeing increasing consumer interest in emerging grill types, such as griddles and pellet grills. “For many consumers, these products—especially griddles—are becoming second-grill purchases, allowing them to expand their outdoor cooking repertoire,” Jacobs said.

Smart technologies are driving innovation in the grilling experience. As technology becomes more advanced, consumers have higher expectations of their devices, including cooking equipment. “Smart grilling is a strategic priority for Weber, and we believe that incorporating smart technology into grilling is now a consumer expectation,” Jacobs said. “People want grills that are easy to use and a more overall simplified grilling process and experience.”

All images credit: Weber LLC





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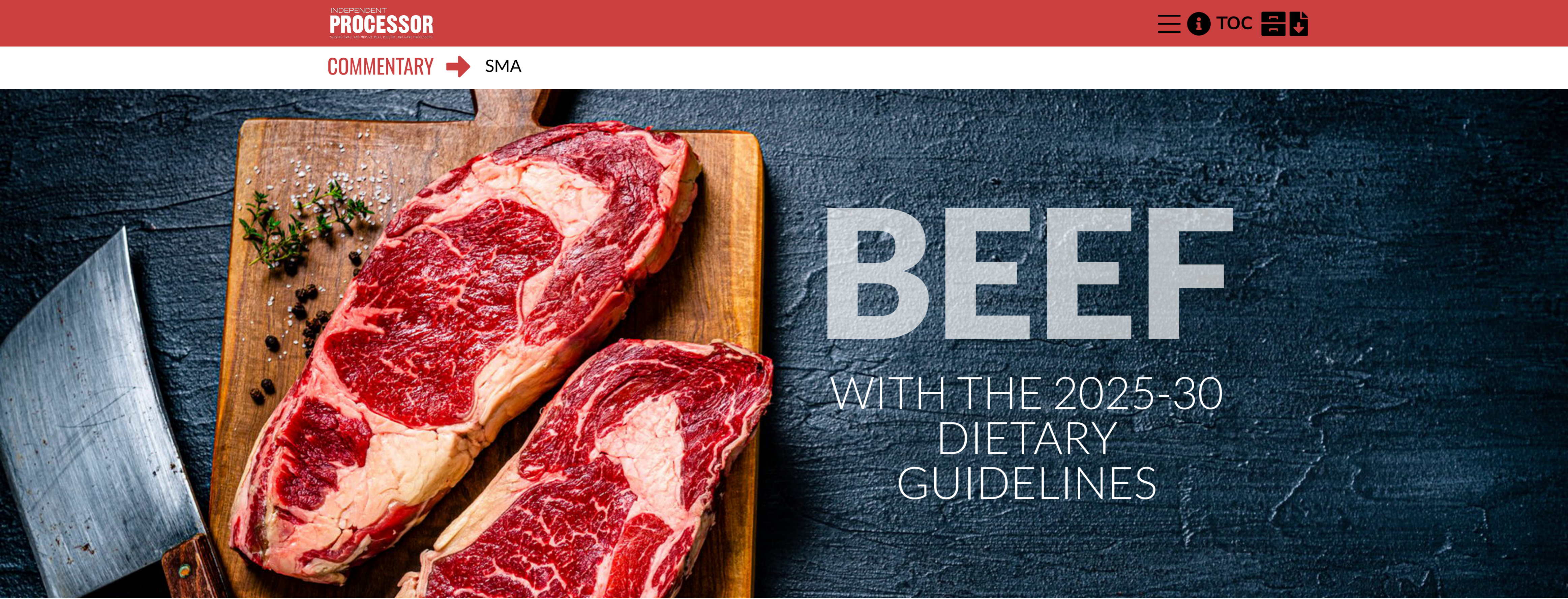
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WITH THE 2025-30 DIETARY GUIDELINES

PROPOSED GUIDELINES EMPHASIZE REDUCING CONSUMPTION OF RED AND PROCESSED MEATS.
BY LACY BATES

Robert Kennedy Jr., secretary of Health and Human Services, and Brooke Rollins, secretary of Agriculture, have one of their first collaboration efforts before them -- The 2025-2030 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. The scientific report has surpassed the comment period and is currently before both secretaries.

The next step is for Kennedy and Rollins to review the report and determine if it will receive their blessing or be vetoed back to the advisory committee. With the concluded findings of the proposed guideline, the meat and poultry industry should be in favor of the latter. Now let's dive into their findings.

The Scientific Report of the 2025 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee is proposing an “Eat Healthy Your Way” dietary pattern. A dietary pattern can be defined as the combination of food and beverages that constitutes an individual's complete dietary intake over time. This may be a description of a customary way of eating or description of a combination of foods recommended for consumption.¹

The “Eat Healthy Your Way” dietary pattern recommends:

- **Emphasizing the intake of beans, peas and lentils, and reducing the intake of red and processed meats.**
- Compelling evidence was noted in the systematic reviews in which dietary patterns that had higher levels of beans, peas, and lentils (often presented in the literature as “legumes”) were associated with beneficial health outcomes.²
- **Moving beans, peas, and lentils from the Starchy Vegetable Food Group to the Protein Food Group and reorganizing the Protein Foods Group to prioritize plant-based proteins**
- The Committee proposes reorganizing the order of the Protein Foods Subgroups to list Beans, Peas, and Lentils first, followed by Nuts, Seeds, and Soy Products, then Seafood, and finally Meats, Poultry, and Eggs. This reordering of Protein Foods emphasizes the health benefits of more plant-based Protein Foods. ²
- **Removing the line for “Limits on Calories for Other Uses”**
- The 2020 Healthy U.S. Style dietary pattern contains a line for “Limits on Calories for Other Uses” within the pattern to represent a quantitative estimate of calories remaining after all other foods in the pattern are consumed in their most nutrient-dense forms. Guidance in the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025 is that these calories can be used for added sugars, saturated fat, and/or alcohol, or to eat more than the recommended amount of food in a food group. Given inherent variability in energy content of nutrient-dense foods and beverages, depending on the individual item selected, an estimate of remaining energy (i.e., as calories for other uses) may be misleading in that calories for other uses may not actually be available because calorie needs may already be fulfilled. Therefore, the Committee recommends removing the line and portrayal of “Limits on Calories for Other Uses” from the pattern. ²
- **Limiting foods and beverages higher in added sugars, saturated fat, and sodium**
- The Committee’s findings reinforce the recommendations in the current 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines to limit total saturated fat intake to less than 10 percent of calories per day starting at age 2 by replacing it with unsaturated fat, particularly polyunsaturated fats. Evidence indicates that when reducing butter, processed and unprocessed red meat, and dairy, substitution or replacement with a wide range of plant-based food sources, including plant-based protein foods (e.g., beans, peas, and lentils), whole grains, vegetables, or monounsaturated fatty acid (MUFA)- and PUFA-rich vegetable oils and spreads, is associated with cardiovascular disease risk reduction. ²

What impacts could the Trump Administration have on the 2025-2023 Dietary Guidelines?

For starters, this is a great opportunity for the Kennedy and Rollins to make a tremendous impact on nutrition policy. Kennedy has been very vocal about his viewpoint on seed oils, food dyes and ultra-processed foods (which has yet to be defined). Both secretaries have shown continued support to the meat and poultry industry.

The 2025 guidelines are expected to be released at the conclusion of 2025. Kennedy and Rollins both have power with a red pen to begin marking up the proposed guidelines. Which is what the meat and poultry industry can hope for. Until we begin to push back as an industry that is known for the most wholesome, beneficial, and easy-accessible protein in the world, we will continue to see a push for more plant-based foods and plant-based diets.

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans was first published in 1980. Ever since then the guidelines have been reviewed and updated every five years by an advisory committee. The advisory committee for the 2025-30 Dietary Guideline was selected by the Biden Administration.

Kenney and Rollins, the meat and poultry industry is counting on you! Make the Center of the Plate Great Again! Let’s put beef, pork and poultry back at the center of the plates of every American, not beans, peas and lentils.

Resources

- 1 *Scientific Report of the 2025 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee: Part F. Appendix F-1: Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations*
- 2 *Scientific Report of the 2025 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee: Part E. Chapter 1: Overarching Advice to the Departments*

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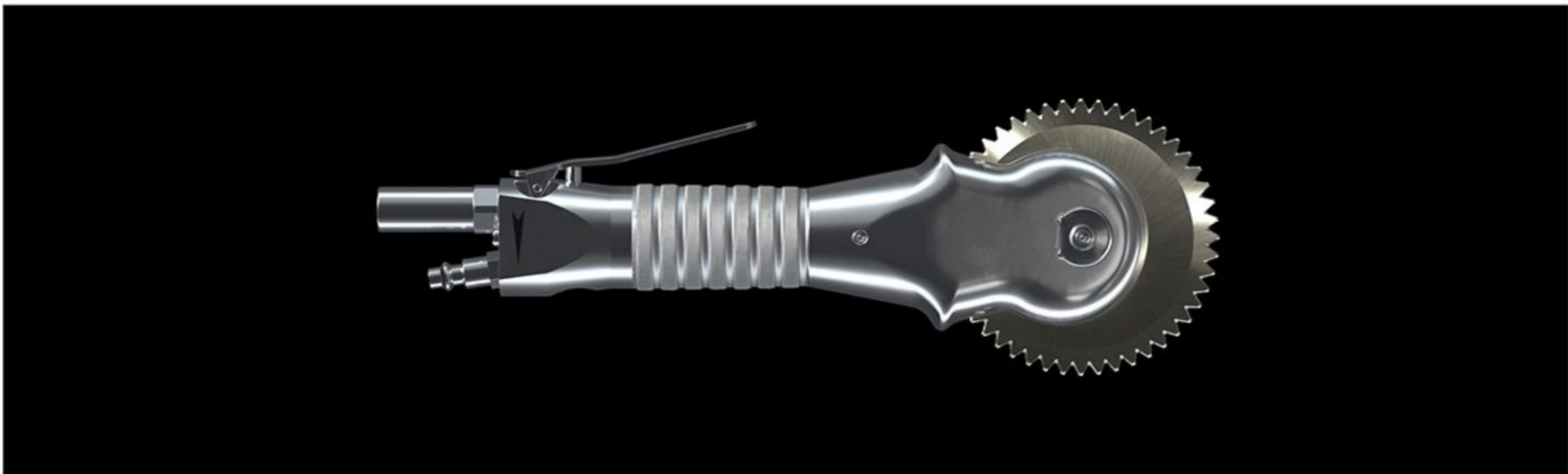
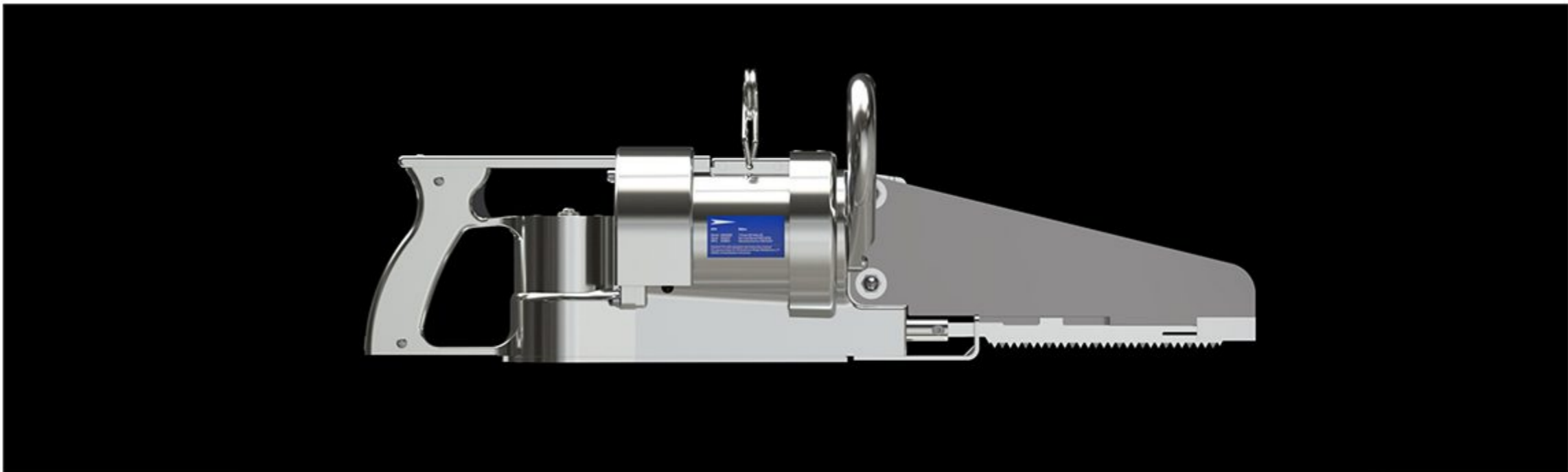
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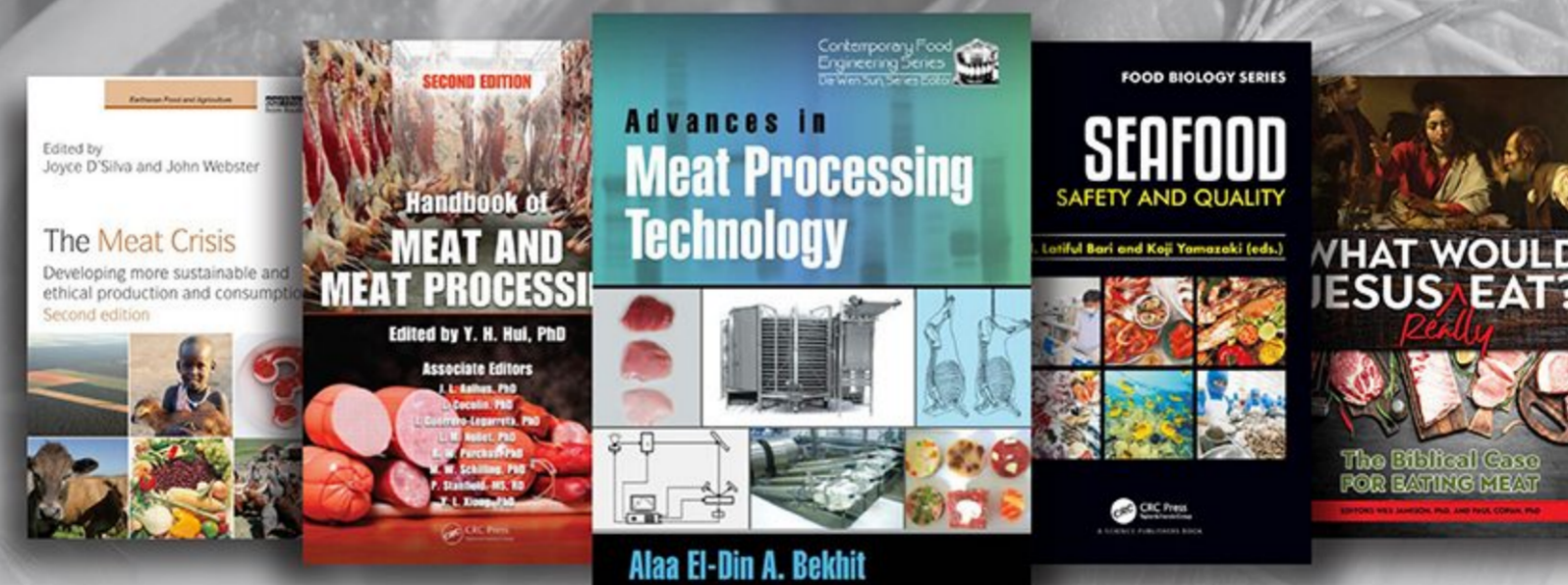
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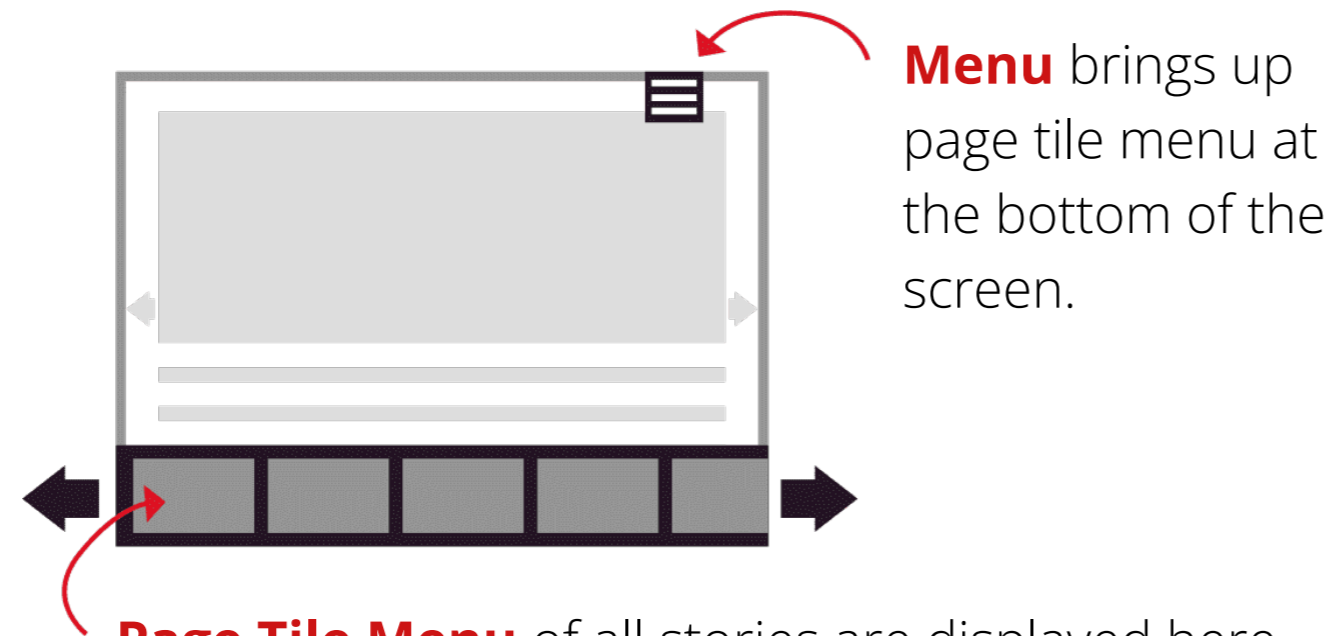
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