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MEAT INDUSTRY HALL OF FAME



CLASS OF 2025

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The National Provisioner and Independent Processor would like to thank all the companies from across the meat and poultry industry value chain who generously shared their unique company stories and insights with our audience in 2025.



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Is your company also leading the way in meat and poultry processing innovation while driving industry growth? You could be here in 2026! We are looking for meat and poultry processors to profile in future issues. Contact editor Fred Wilkinson at wilkinsonf@bnpmedia.com.

Thank You

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Rebecca Marquez

Director of Custom Research
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PMMI'S REBECCA MARQUEZ SHARES AN UPDATE ON PACKAGING TRENDS FOR MEAT AND POULTRY

PMMI's Director of Custom Research Rebecca Marquez details how new technologies and market trends are influencing packaging decisions for meat and poultry products.



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- 2. Honey Baked Ham Co. adds prime rib to the menu
- 3. Omaha Steaks introduces elf-sized steak meal for family fun
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MOST-POPULAR FEATURES:

- 1. Meat Industry Hall of Fame selects the Class of 2025
- 2. 2025 Top 100 Meat and Poultry Processors: Record meat sales fuel
- 3. Tyson Foods to close Nebraska beef plant in Lexington
- 4. Sustainable Beef deploys AI animal welfare monitoring system at new Nebraska plant
- 5. Is the meat and poultry industry over-investigating Listeria?



- 1. Episode 216: Scaling verified regenerative sourcing across meat production
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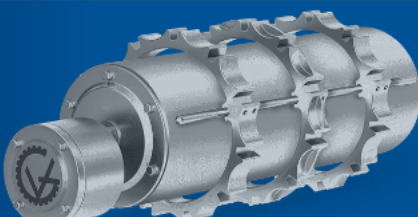
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MEET THE MEAT INDUSTRY HALL OF FAME'S

NEWEST MEMBERS

EACH YEAR, SOME OF THE MEAT AND POULTRY INDUSTRY'S true innovators are welcomed into the Meat Industry Hall of Fame.

This year's roster of inductees continues that proud tradition, which *The National Provisioner* is honored to be a part of:

- Mark Miller
- Fritz and Gary Bernegger
- David J. Meisinger
- Craig Bacon
- Henry Davis
- Michael Strauss

The induction reception and ceremony for the Meat Industry Hall of Fame Class of 2025 will take place during IPPE 2026 in Atlanta. *The National Provisioner* congratulates the seven new inductees and invites all meat and poultry professionals to join in honoring these leaders who have shaped the North American food industry.


Don't miss Associate Group Editor Sammy Bredar's profile of the Meat Industry Hall of Fame Class of 2025 in this issue.



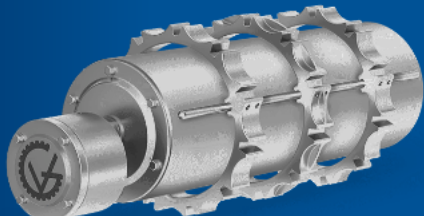
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MEAT INDUSTRY
HALL OF FAME



CLASS
OF 2025

SEVEN LEADERS JOIN THE MEAT INDUSTRY HALL OF FAME IN THE CLASS OF 2025.

BY SAMMY BREDAR

ASSOCIATE GROUP EDITOR

The National Provisioner is proud to welcome the Meat Industry Hall of Fame Class of 2025. After nominations solicited from the meat and poultry industry and voting by past inductees, seven distinguished individuals were selected for this year's class, including a joint induction for a father and son. The Class of 2025 inductees' careers exemplify excellence, innovation and service in areas including meat science, processing, education, and community impact.

MARK MILLER, PH.D.

Mark Miller, holder of the San Antonio Livestock Exposition Inc. Endowed Chair in Animal and Food Science at the Davis College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources, Texas Tech University, has made significant contributions to the global meat science community. Raised on a dairy farm in Cleburne, Texas, Miller earned a Bachelor of Science and Master of Science from Texas Tech University and a PhD in meat science and muscle biology from Texas A&M University in 1987. He worked as a meat scientist at the University of Georgia, served as director of research and quality assurance for Montfort of Colorado, and joined Texas Tech University in 1990, where he became a professor in 1995. Over his career, he has led a meat science research program for more than three decades and co-coached 38 college meat judging teams, the most in history.

Miller was an early adopter of HACCP-like approaches in the pork industry, implemented years before formal HACCP standards, and conducted pioneering research on diet modification effects on pork fat composition, the impact of chilling on pork carcasses, and validation of dentition and skeletal maturity for cattle age determination. His consumer-focused research has influenced beef tenderness and flavor standards, working with Tyson, Walmart, Cargill, USDA, Cryovac and multiple breed associations, as well as retail and foodservice companies.

Internationally, Miller has collaborated with processing plants and industry officials across Australia, New Zealand, Mexico, Honduras, Costa Rica, Poland, Wales, France, Ireland and Malawi. His research on iron micronutrient deficiencies in Malawi contributed to reductions in mortality rates among high-risk populations. Over his career, he has secured \$33 million in research funding, authored 250 journal articles, 15 books and book chapters, 220 technical articles, 500 abstracts and holds 33 US patents.

Miller's influence in meat judging since 1981 is unparalleled, with 15 national championship teams, 121 total wins and mentorship of more than 250 young professionals. He has hosted over 33 clinics and 131 contests, placing hundreds of students into the meat and food industry. Miller's work in education and research demonstrates a long-standing commitment to advancing the meat industry globally.

FRITZ AND GARY BERNEGGER

Fritz Bernegger emigrated from Salzburg, Austria, in 1926 and became an apprentice sausage maker before establishing himself in the Midwest meat industry. In New London, Wisc., Fritz launched a small processing facility that ultimately evolved into Hillshire Farm, one of the nation's leading meat brands. He emphasized quality and consistency, pioneering natural-casing sausage production and elevating Hillshire Farm to national recognition.

Fritz organized the Professional Procurement Organization and served as its first president. He also served on the New London School Board for six years, was president of the Community Hospital Board of Directors for 12 years and participated actively in civic and faith-based organizations. He founded and chaired the United Way Fund of the New London area.

Fritz was a recipient of the New London Jaycees' Distinguished Citizen's award in 1972. In 1979, he was honored by the New London Community with a "Fritz Bernegger Day." He was awarded the Distinction of Service in Agriculture and Rural Life in 1984, presented by the University of Wisconsin Department of Agriculture.

Gary Bernegger, Fritz's son, worked alongside him to expand the business. After Hillshire Farm was acquired by Consolidated Foods (now Sara Lee) in 1971, Gary was appointed president at just 35 years old. He assembled a nationwide management team to grow operations, develop smoked sausage and deli meat lines and secure the top market share in both categories. Gary served as corporate vice president for Sara Lee Meat Group from 1985–1990, and Sara Lee Corporate Development from 1990–1992. Companies under his supervision included Hillshire Farm, Kahns, Gallo Salami, Peck Packing (Emmbers Brand), Galileo Sausage and Gibbon Packing.

Always active throughout his 60 years in the industry, Gary was a director of the International Natural Casing Association as well as the National Independent Meat Packers Association. He served as the AMI Delegate to the National Livestock and Meat Board and was instrumental in forming a Processed Meats Committee, serving as its first chair.

As an independent consultant in 1992–1994, Gary recruited a meat industry team for Epstein Engineering to start up Constar Meat Packing in Starachowice, Poland, which was the largest meat packing plant in Europe at the time.

Serving his local community, Gary served as a director on the bank board for 40 years, as well as on the boards for Duralam Packaging, Wisconsin Manufacturers Association and St Joseph Residence. He served as chairman for New London Family Medical and Riverside Paper Corp. He was also a charter member of the Wolf River Healthcare Foundation. Fritz and Gary's dedication to quality, family, faith and community reflects decades of sustained impact on the meat industry.

DAVID J. MEISINGER, PH.D.

David J. Meisinger's lifelong dedication to the advancement of animal agriculture and meat science has left a lasting mark on the pork industry. Growing up on a 1,000-acre farm, Meisinger earned nine consecutive grand champion market lamb titles in 4-H and served in FFA leadership roles, laying the foundation for a career of excellence. He earned a Bachelor of Science and Master of Science in general agriculture and animal industries from Southern Illinois University and a Ph.D. in animal nutrition (swine) and physiology from Iowa State University.

Meisinger's professional journey includes serving as Iowa Area Livestock Specialist, as well as director of research and education at the National Pork Producers Council, where he launched the Sulfa-Safe Task Force, conceived the Pork Conference and developed the SYMBOL program, establishing a benchmark for pork carcass excellence that evolved through SYMBOL II and III.

Meisinger worked for IMC/Pittman Moore from 1985 to 1991, leading market development for Porcine Somatotropin and overseeing all swine products worldwide. From 1991 to 1993, he pioneered a revolutionary carcass buying program at Indiana Packers Corp., and from 1993 to 1995, he directed the construction and production of a vertically integrated sow operation at Fetterman Farms.

During his decade at the National Pork Board, he launched PORK 101, the Transport Quality Assurance program and the Factors Affecting Pork Quality guide. He led comprehensive quality audits, established pork color and marbling standards and modernized carcass merit guidelines, all of which became enduring industry benchmarks still in use today.

As executive director of the US Pork Center of Excellence, Meisinger championed collaboration across the sector, developing National Swine Nutrition and Reproduction Guides, the Pork Information Gateway and the first online Swine Science curriculum. He continues to serve the industry as a contract auditor for Validus and president of VRM Labs. Meisinger's service includes decades of involvement in the American Meat Science Association — where he held leadership roles, spearheaded the creation of AMSA's PORK 101 program and received the Industry Service Award — and nearly six decades as a member and fellow of the American Society of Animal Science.

Beyond his professional contributions, Meisinger has dedicated decades to the Boy Scouts of America, mentoring numerous scouts to Eagle Rank, and has served his church community as an Elder and program facilitator. His career reflects innovation, integrity, and lasting influence on the meat industry.

CRAIG BACON, PH.D.

Craig Bacon has exemplified visionary leadership in meat science and product development for more than three decades. Beginning as a graduate instructor and researcher in meat science at the University of Tennessee, his doctoral research on impingement cooking and antioxidants in sausage links foreshadowed a career of technical excellence.

At Tyson Foods, Bacon rose from R&D manager to senior vice president, overseeing a \$50 million annual budget and a team of nearly 300 professionals. His leadership enabled the R&D group to deliver over 6,000 new products annually for major retail brands and top foodservice chains. Bacon implemented product lifecycle management and dashboard performance metrics that reshaped how innovation is measured across the industry.

Currently serving as senior vice president of technical services at Simmons Foods, Bacon oversees food safety and quality for retail and foodservice poultry and pet products. He has also served as president, treasurer and fellow of the American Meat Science Association, chaired the Reciprocal Meat Conference and contributed to numerous committees and strategic initiatives. Bacon has been a long-standing supporter of youth development through the National FFA Foundation, including roles as chairman of the sponsor board and board of trustees.

Honored with the AMSA Achievement Award, the Signal Service Award and multiple FFA distinctions, Bacon's career demonstrates a commitment to people, excellence and industry progress.

HENRY DAVIS

Henry Davis, owner and CEO of Greater Omaha Packing Co., has led the third-generation company to international recognition for premium beef. Davis took over his grandfather's business in 1987 and has served as the CEO for over 30 years, overseeing more than a tenfold expansion. He implemented sustainable meat production practices, emphasizing environmentally responsible operations that align with consumer demands for transparency and eco-consciousness. Davis has also long recognized the importance of maintaining an experienced and dedicated workforce, implementing innovative employee benefit programs and resulting in high workforce retention.

Davis has contributed significantly to the broader industry through active involvement with the North American Meat Institute and its predecessor organizations for over 30 years. He is recognized as a leading advocate with state and federal officials, consistently representing the meat sector.

Davis' philanthropy is extensive, focusing on children and underserved communities. Davis has donated more than \$10 million to Project Harmony, one of the nation's leading child advocacy centers, and supported numerous other nonprofits, including healthcare institutions, museums and youth organizations. His contributions to the Boys & Girls Club led to a facility named in his honor, reflecting his long-term commitment to creating opportunities for young people.

MICHAEL STRAUSS

Michael Strauss has contributed nearly five decades of leadership and innovation to the meat industry. Formerly co-owner of AEW Engineering and co-founder of AEW North America, Ltd., now key components of JBT/Marel and Middleby Corporation, AEW was manufacturer and distributor of meat processing equipment where Michael helped usher in a new era of automation in meat cutting which truly revolutionized how portion-controlled meats are produced around the world.

Under his leadership, AEW introduced technologies that transformed the industry, including automated systems for sawing bone-in pork chops, ham steaks, and automated slicing systems for boneless steaks and many other cuts. These innovations not only improved efficiency and yield but also set new standards for safety and consistency — achievements that continue to shape meat processing today.

He was named American Meat Institute Supplier of the Year in 2001, was the first supplier to become a member of the North American Meat Processors (NAMP), the first supplier elected to the NAMP Board of Directors, served as NAMP President, and was recognized with NAMP's Angus Award.

Strauss also advanced new approaches to marketing and industry communications. His vision and collaboration helped launch the first electronic supplier directory and daily news reporting, laying the foundation for how information is generated and conveyed to industry professionals across North America and beyond.

Today, Strauss is actively in the pharmaceutical and pet areas of the meat business, and is an investor-partner in Amylu Foods LLC, the nation's leading manufacturer of "better for you" chicken sausage, chicken meatballs, chicken burgers and a variety of other products. With his wife, Debra, he remains active in the community supporting at-risk youth through mentoring, counseling, crisis intervention and early childhood programs. Strauss's career reflects innovation, leadership and a commitment to both industry and community.

INDUCTING THE CLASS OF 2025

The induction reception and ceremony for the Meat Industry Hall of Fame Class of 2025 will be held at the International Production and Processing Expo 2026. The National Provisioner congratulates the seven new inductees and invites all meat and poultry professionals to join in honoring these leaders who have shaped the North American food industry.

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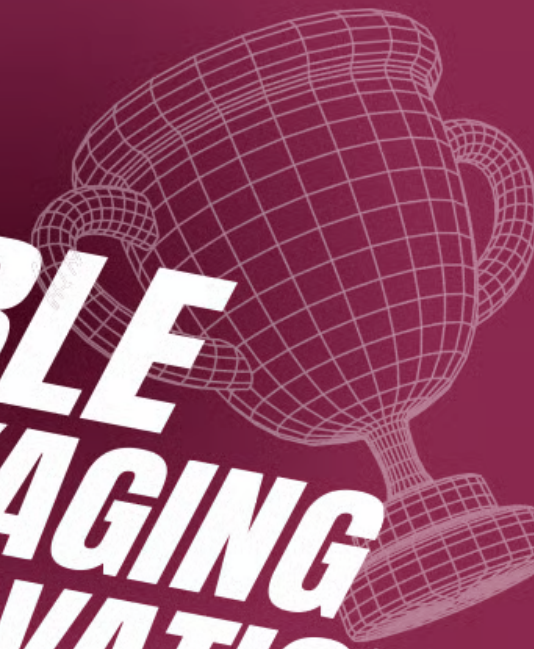


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AFFORDABILITY AND VERSATILITY POWER POULTRY SALES

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Ideas for the future.

YOUNGER GENERATIONS OVER-INDEX FOR PURCHASING CHICKEN.

BY FRED WILKINSON
CHIEF EDITOR

ON THE FRESH SIDE, TURKEY PRICES IN LATE 2025 were down year-on-year and chicken inflation weighed in at a low 1.1%, according to Circana retail sales data analysis. On the processed side, processed chicken (nuggets, strips, etc.) prices were up very modestly compared with November 2024.

Fresh chicken prices at retail in late 2025 averaged \$3.14 per pound, with fresh chicken prices totaling \$1.5 billion in November 2025 (up 6.6% over year-ago levels). Fresh turkey sales were \$818 million, up 1.1%, with prices averaging \$1.35 per pound.

Although the US Department of Agriculture foresees a conservative 1% increase in chicken production in 2026, analysts say there are reasons supporting the actual increase will align more closely with the 2-plus percentage growth experienced in 2025, said Tom Super, senior vice president of public affairs at the National Chicken Council.

While consumers already identify that chicken is a great, healthy choice as a way to enjoy more protein in their meals and snacks, marketers will be emphasizing this virtue on their labeling of chicken packages and messaging to food shoppers, Super said. With the step-up in chicken marketings, the better supply will offer affordability, especially when compared with alternative meats.

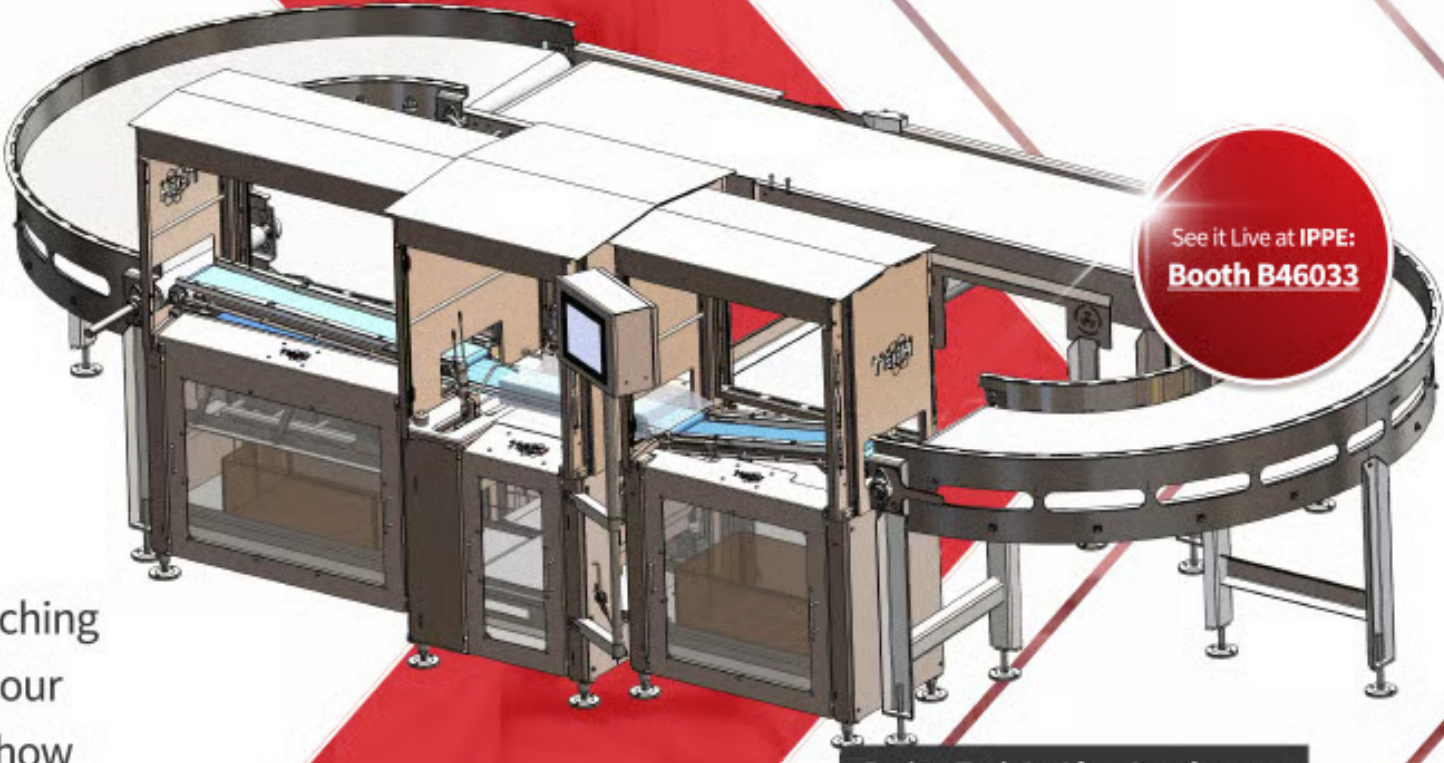


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“With chicken production and consumption slated for another record year in 2026, the challenge will be to successfully develop and market innovative new products that appeal to consumers to have another helping of chicken in their ongoing meal pattern,” Super said. “As the away-from-home market segment continues to re-find its footing, consumers are turning more-so to their favorite supermarket for semi-prepared/fully prepared products and complete meals that deliver the foodservice dining experience of taste, flavor, texture and aroma. Easily said but a challenge for the at-home market.”

The poultry market is seeing an interesting dynamic at retail at the moment, said Anne-Marie Roerink, principal at 210 Analytics.

“It’s not as much consumers switching away from beef toward chicken as it is beef and chicken winning together,” Roerink said.

In the past year, beef and chicken generated 58% of all meat department sales and 83% of fresh meat sales, she said.

That said, chicken enjoys great popularity all on its own.

“It’s the perfect canvas for usage across meal occasions and cuisines,” Roerink said. “This is true for home usage, but also the wide variation of options in the deli department, from rotisserie and fried chicken to chicken wing programs and the use of chicken in deli-prepared dishes, including Indian, Thai, etc.”

Because chicken is cost-effective and easy to prepare, it is growing hand-in-hand with beef.

“Over the past year, the share of households buying chicken grew -- the number of times it was purchased increased and consumers are spending more per trip -- that’s the sales growth trifecta that points to sustained growth in years to come,” she said. “Another positive sign is that younger generations over-index for purchasing chicken. As meat department dollars are shifting from Boomers to Millennials, that puts chicken in the driver’s seat even more.”

Roerink said chicken is purchased across incomes levels and ethnicities, which gives it a broad and stable customer base.

“Cross-store growth is another sign of chicken’s strength, with frozen and deli adding more dollars and growth,” she added.

VALUE-ADDED PRODUCTS

Value-added is an area with ever-growing presence for poultry products.

What started as pre-marinated or seasoned chicken breast, legs and wings, has grown into a wide offering at the deli as well as many ready-to-cook meal solutions that involve chicken.

“With Gen Z and Millennial dollars representing more than two-thirds of all growth in the department, global cuisines, spicy flavors but also TikTok favorites are making inroads,” Roerink said. “For instance, when hot honey started gaining TikTok fame, it made inroads in value-added meat at retail as well. Same is true for a variety of Korean flavors, dill pickle, etc.”

She said the market continues to suggest that some consumers are looking hard at the per-unit price to find the package that fits their budget, while others take advantage of bulk packs and often refreeze them to use over time.

“While many consumers have vacuum sealers of their own these days, a popular package type is the saddle pack where consumers can enjoy bulk discounts, but still have pre-portioned chicken for a meal,” she said. “Buying in bulk is more popular in meat and has been for a few years whereas in produce the unit size has gone down. Consumers are hyper-focused on preventing food waste, which means vacuum packaging is welcomed as a way to keep it in the fridge longer as well as it being freezer ready.”

Spending from higher-income consumers also is influencing chicken and turkey product sales.

“Consumers making \$100,000 or more a year do over-index for chicken, but they tend to over-index for all meats,” Roerink said. “Importantly, engagement is strong across incomes. Chicken grinds are making inroads as well, which is another way to bring affordable solutions.”

FOODSERVICE FAVORITE

Chicken endures as a foodservice favorite, with many large chains adding chicken-based dishes to the menu.

“Operators’ No. 1 issue in today’s marketplace is cost, and chicken helps keep menu prices in check,” Roerink said. “That means a lot of focus on chicken appetizers and mains. We saw McDonald’s bring back their chicken wrap and Wendy’s had a play on Wednesday Addams with a chicken nugget meal, for instance.”

Others, like pizza chain Mellow Mushroom, ran with “Taco Nirvana” that created a taco-flavored pizza using chicken.

“At the same time, we see chains like Arby’s making bold introductions such as steak nuggets that quickly went viral,” she said. “Chick-fil-A and Raising Canes have been growing trips for many years, according to Placer.ai data.”

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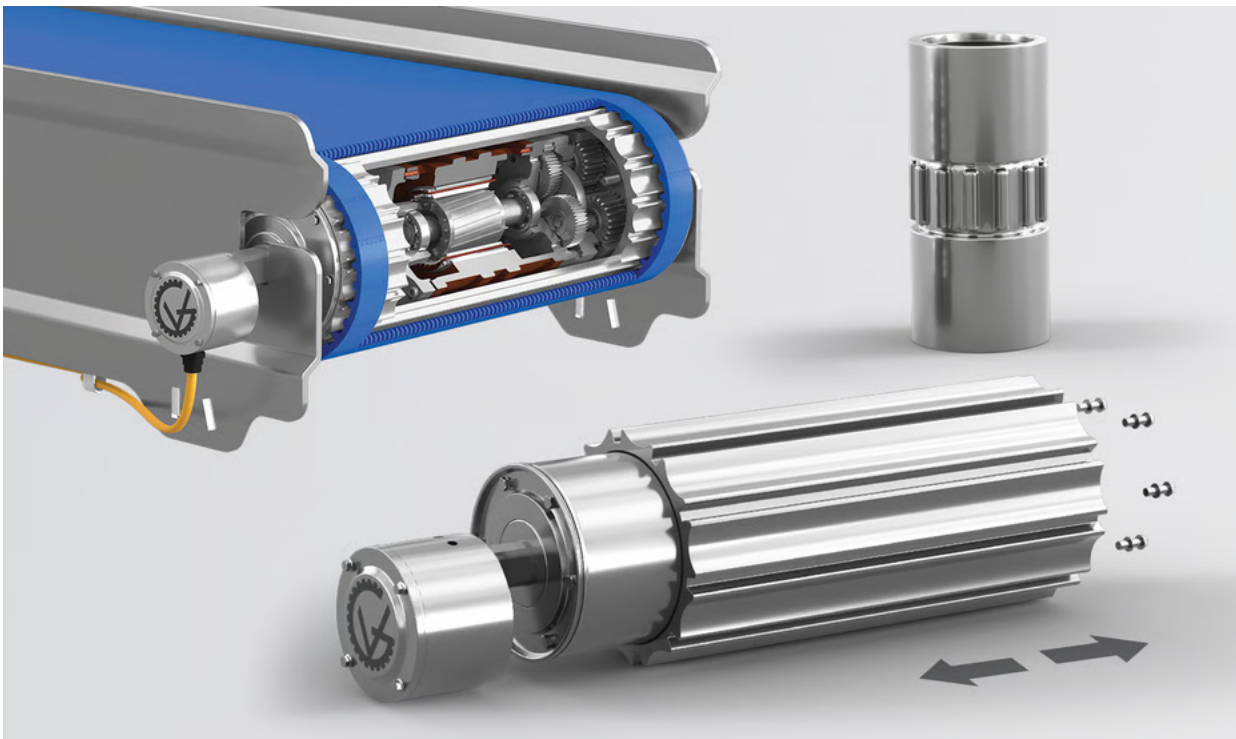
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BY FRED WILKINSON
CHIEF EDITOR

New-hire skills gaps processors point to are in the fundamentals: operator onboarding, equipment operation, sanitation and basic food-safety practices.

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"In margin-sensitive businesses like protein processing, that level of consistency can be a major competitive advantage," Burica said. "When training becomes intentional instead of ad hoc, both employees and supervisors see immediate benefits," Burica said. "When operators know what they're doing, you see fewer miscuts, mislabels, equipment jams, and quality holds, all the little things that negatively impact operational efficiencies. Well-trained employees handle changeovers more efficiently, keep equipment running within spec, and identify small problems before they become major issues."

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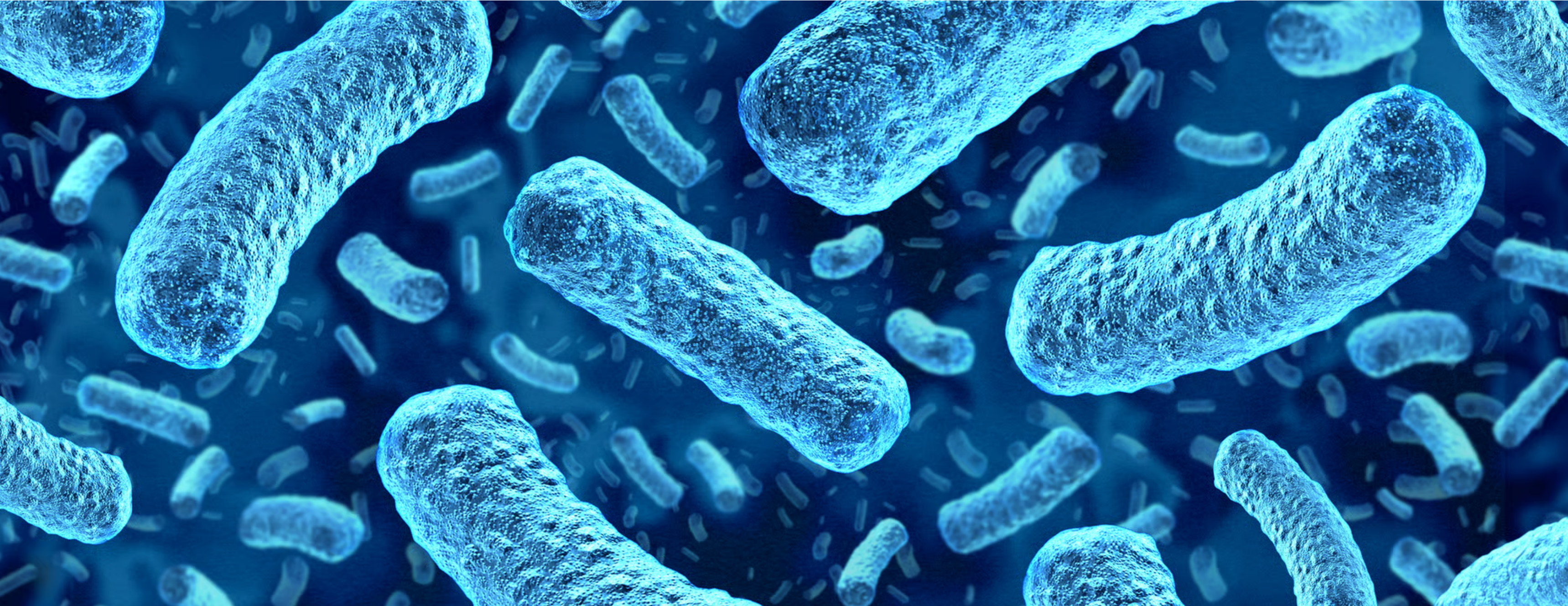
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THE IMPORTANCE OF POST-RECALL LISTERIA CONTROL

A RECALL AND THE WORK THAT FOLLOWS IS THE BEGINNING OF THE MOST IMPORTANT PHASE OF *LISTERIA* CONTROL.

BY SHAWN K. STEVENS
FOOD INDUSTRY COUNSEL LLC

WHEN A RECALL IS TRIGGERED FOR *LISTERIA* CONCERNS, the eventual closure of the recall often feels like an ending. Affected products are identified, contained and recovered or destroyed. Investigations are performed, root causes are identified, corrective actions are implemented, and operations eventually resume. From the outside, it can look like all of the hard work has been finished.

In reality, however, a recall and the work that follows is actually the beginning of the most important phase of *Listeria* control. In the weeks immediately following a *Listeria* recall event, most facilities operate at their best. Environmental testing increases, sanitation oversight tightens, senior leaders spend more time on the floor, decisions are made more quickly and, when positives occur, they are addressed decisively. For a certain period of time, the system works exactly as intended.

The challenge for many food companies is that these improvements are often driven by urgency rather than structure. As time passes, and the recall begins to fade from memory, many organizations will gradually revert to old practices. Cleaning and sanitation efforts may begin to diminish in intensity, sampling frequency and intensity may decrease, and rout case analysis and corrective actions may become routine rather than investigative. In many cases, production pressures quietly regain authority, and the sharp edge of vigilance can become dulled.

This is where risk begins to rebuild and the previous success can begin to unravel. What should change after a *Listeria* event is not simply the number of samples collected or the intensity of sanitation. What should change is how the food safety system is supported and strengthened.

Indeed, food safety decision authority must be clear and durable. Many companies discover during a recall that they may have empowered individuals to stop production in theory, but not in practice. After a *Listeria* event, that authority must be unambiguous, and consistently supported by leadership, long after the immediate crisis has passed.

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In addition, environmental data must be leveraged and acted upon rigorously. Trend reports are only useful if the company commits to understand them, question them, and act upon them. Data without analysis does not reduce risk, it simply creates records.

Environmental sampling must be treated as intelligence gathering, to support food safety decision making, not just relegated as another chore. Testing should be used to learn how the facility behaves over time, where organisms persist, and how traffic, equipment, and people interact. When sampling and testing is reduced to a box-checking exercise, it loses much of its preventive value.

Finally, leadership behavior matters more than any written program. Employees take cues from what leaders tolerate on the floor, whether it involves shortcuts, delayed corrective actions, or unexplained exceptions to recommended food safety actions or interventions. Sustainable *Listeria* control depends on leaders who consistently reinforce expectations through their own actions.

The true measure of success after a *Listeria* recall is not how quickly operations resume, or how many corrective actions are closed, it is whether the facility continues to operates more effectively one, two, and three years later. The goal is not perfection, it's persistence. And, with a persistent, and unwavering, approach to food safety, the likelihood of recurrence becomes nearly zero.

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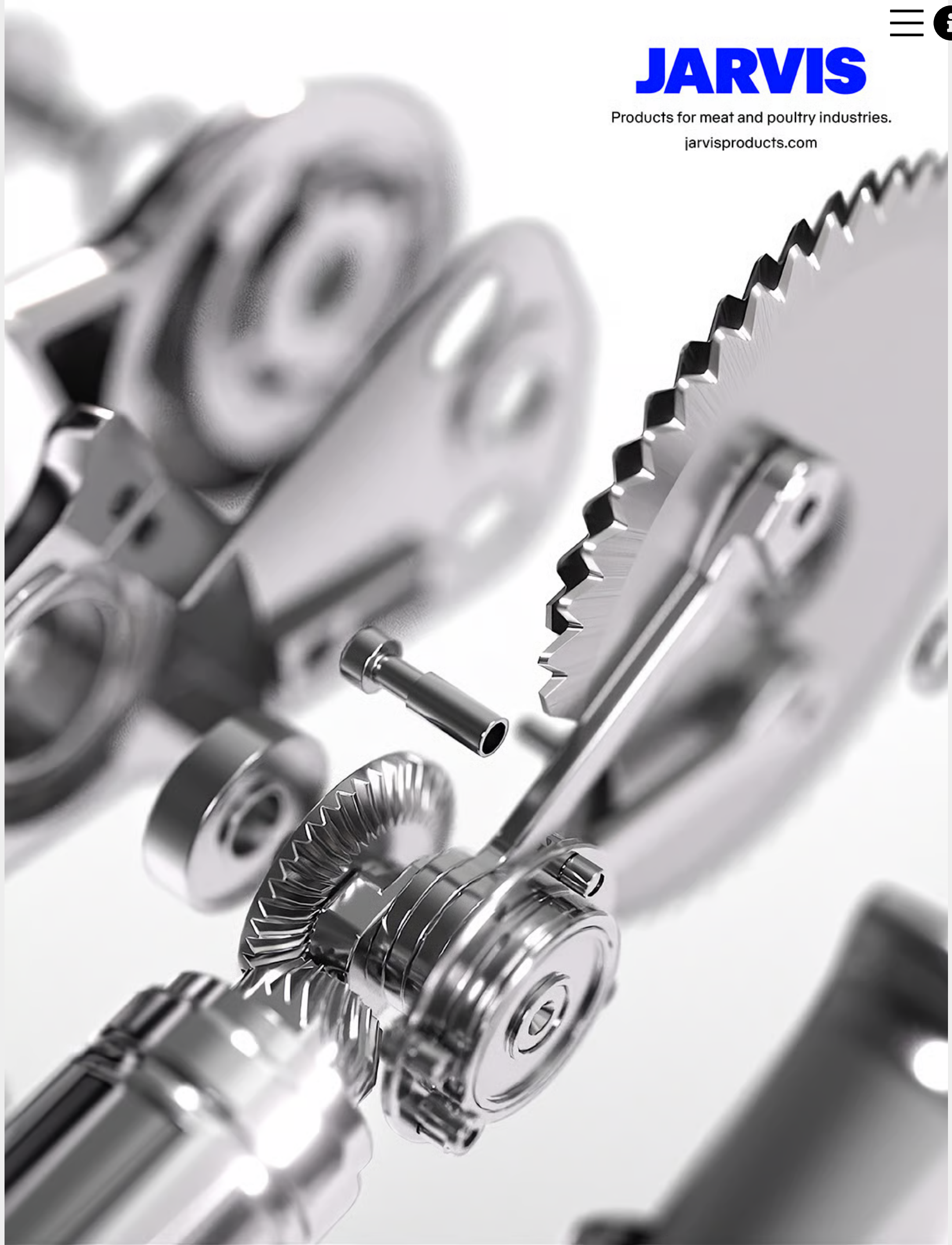
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PREDICTING PORK QUALITY FROM TEMPERATURE AND PH DATA

UNDERSTANDING AND CONTROLLING PH AND TEMPERATURE DECLINE EARLY IN PROCESSING OFFERS A NEW WAY TO ENHANCE MEAT QUALITY AND CONSISTENCY ACROSS THE SUPPLY CHAIN.

BY BRANDON FIELDS, MCKENNA KENT, XUENAN CHEN, BRUNO VALENTE, NEAL MATTHEWS, L. CLAY EASTWOOD, ANDRZEJ SOSNICKI

IN THE PORK INDUSTRY, PRODUCT CONSISTENCY IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT MEASURES OF SUCCESS. Variability in color, drip loss, and firmness can influence consumer perception, shelf life, and export value. To better understand these drivers, PIC investigated whether meat quality could be predicted early in the chilling process—before fabrication even begins.

The research evaluated carcasses from multiple U.S. processing facilities using different chilling systems, continuously recording loin muscle temperature and pH over a 20-hour period. The goal was to build predictive models that connect early postmortem changes to measurable quality outcomes. The results provide valuable insight for processors seeking to improve uniformity and reduce losses caused by inconsistent quality.

DRIVERS OF PORK QUALITY

Pigs are highly sensitive to stress during transport and handling before harvest. Factors such as loading conditions, lairage time, and handling methods can accelerate muscle metabolism and trigger a rapid decline in pH after slaughter. When this drop in pH occurs while the carcass temperature is still high, muscle proteins begin to break down, resulting in pale, soft, and exudative (PSE) pork.

Controlling temperature decline is one of the most effective ways to manage this risk. A faster chilling rate slows postmortem glycolysis, reducing the rate of pH decline and helping maintain color and water-holding capacity.

In commercial environments, these parameters are difficult to measure continuously. Most studies have relied on limited data collected at set intervals. PIC scientists used specialized equipment to capture pH and temperature readings every minute throughout the chilling process, creating a detailed picture of how carcasses respond to different cooling systems. This continuous data allowed for stronger modeling and a clearer understanding of the biological changes that influence final product quality.



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STUDY DESIGN

The research evaluated 210 carcasses across four commercial facilities. Two plants used blast chilling, one used soft-blast chilling, and one used conventional chilling. Temperature and pH were measured continuously in the loin muscle for 20 hours postmortem, starting 40 minutes after slaughter. Loin quality was assessed 24 hours postmortem based on color, pH, firmness, marbling, and drip loss. Data were analyzed to identify time points and patterns that best predicted final product quality.

KEY FINDINGS

Carcasses that consistently cooled faster produced higher-quality loins. Facilities using blast chilling showed a reduced rate and extent of pH decline ($P < .05$), resulting in darker color ($P < .05$) and less drip loss ($P < .05$). Conventional chilling, which allowed a slower temperature decline, was associated with faster pH decline and more drip loss.

The most accurate predictive model used pH values taken at 75, 300, and 360 minutes postmortem along with temperature data at 345 and 1,200 minutes. This model predicted 20-hour bone-in pH with a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.94$, demonstrating that early postmortem data can accurately forecast final product quality.

Moderate correlations were also found for predicting color and drip loss, showing that both traits are influenced by how quickly the carcass cools within the first several hours postmortem.

APPLYING THE FINDINGS IN THE PLANT

These results provide practical insights for commercial processors who want to fine-tune chilling systems and reduce variation in product quality. By identifying specific time points in the temperature and pH decline curves, plants can target process adjustments where they have the most impact, optimizing air flow, carcass spacing and chilling duration to consistently achieve desired quality outcomes.

The research also highlights the potential for more data-driven process control. As sensor technology and automation continue to advance, early postmortem measurements could eventually be used for real-time carcass classification. This would enable processors to make immediate adjustments that protect meat quality and improve overall efficiency.

INTEGRATING GENETICS AND PROCESSING

This research builds on PIC's broader focus on genetic improvement and carcass value realization. While genetics define the biological potential for meat quality, postharvest management determines how much of that potential is achieved.

Environmental factors such as chilling rate and handling practices often have a stronger influence on final meat quality than genetics alone. By measuring how temperature and pH interact during the chilling process, the study connects PIC's genetic advancements to practical applications that help processors consistently deliver high-quality pork.

INDUSTRY IMPACT

While these models will require validation within individual plants, they represent a practical step toward predictive quality management. Each abattoir operates under unique conditions — such as chilling system design, carcass size and airflow — that influence cooling and pH patterns. Developing facility-specific models could further improve accuracy and allow processors to fine-tune their systems for optimal performance.

Understanding and controlling pH and temperature decline early in processing offers a new way to enhance meat quality and consistency across the supply chain. For processors and consumers alike, this approach helps ensure that every cut meets the standard of quality expected from modern pork production.

Chen, X., Valente, B., Matthews, N., Eastwood, L. C., Sosnicki, A. & Fields, B., (2025) "Prediction of Pork Loin Quality Using Postmortem Temperature and pH Decline Curves", *Meat and Muscle Biology* 9(1): 18416, 1-14. doi: <https://doi.org/10.22175/mmb.18416>

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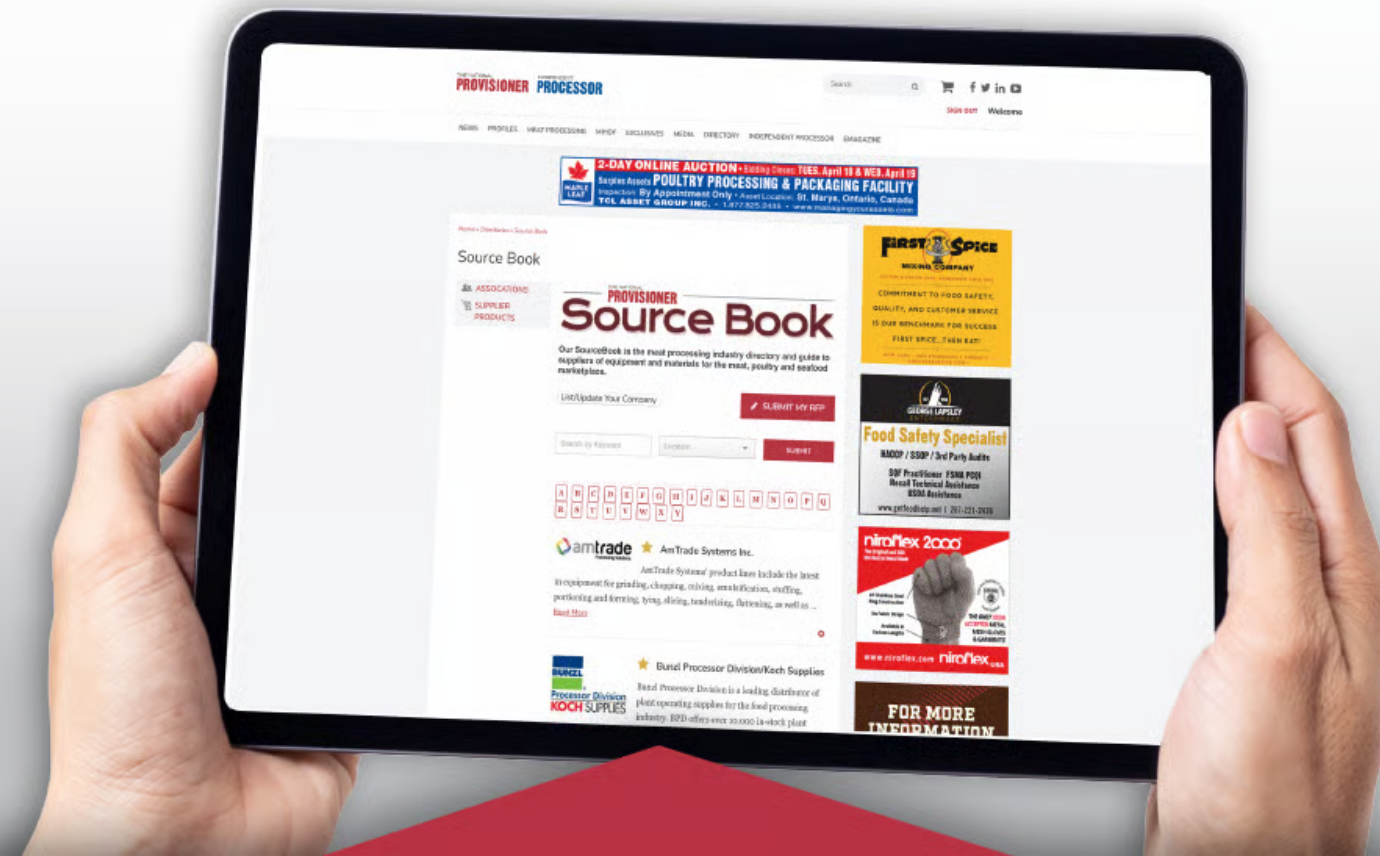
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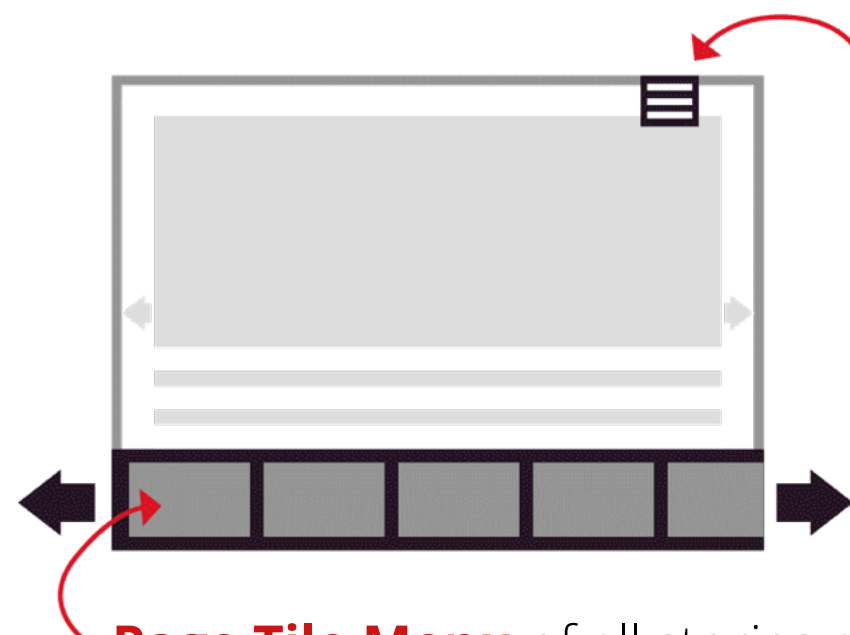
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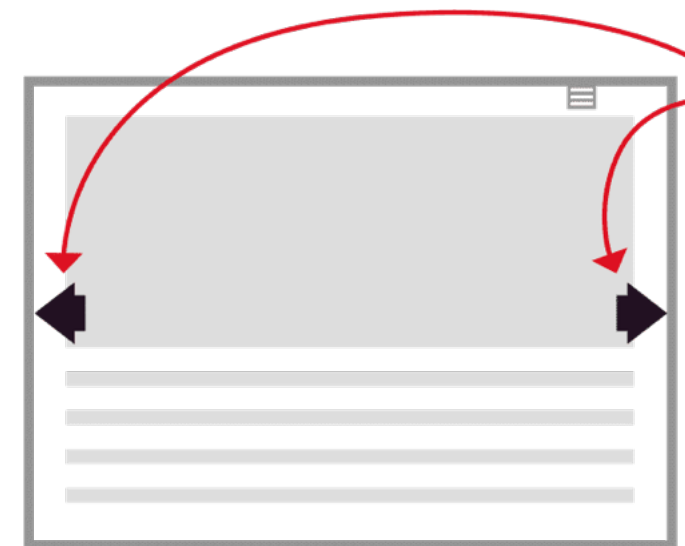
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