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**CONSUMER
TRENDS
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Bryan Freeman
Executive Chairman
Real Good Foods

INSIDE SCOOP: REAL GOOD FOODS ENTERS THE MEATBALL CATEGORY


Real Goods Foods Executive Chairman Bryan Freeman discusses the company's entrance into the meatball category with its chicken meatball line. In this exclusive interview, Freeman walks The National Provisioner through the development process for the meatball line and explains how this innovation aligns with consumer shopping priorities.

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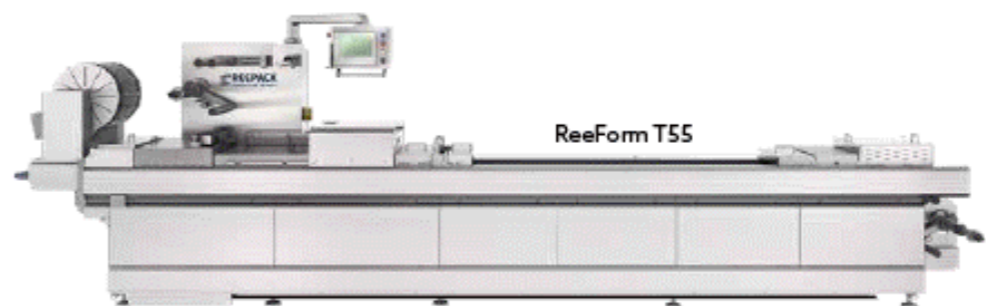

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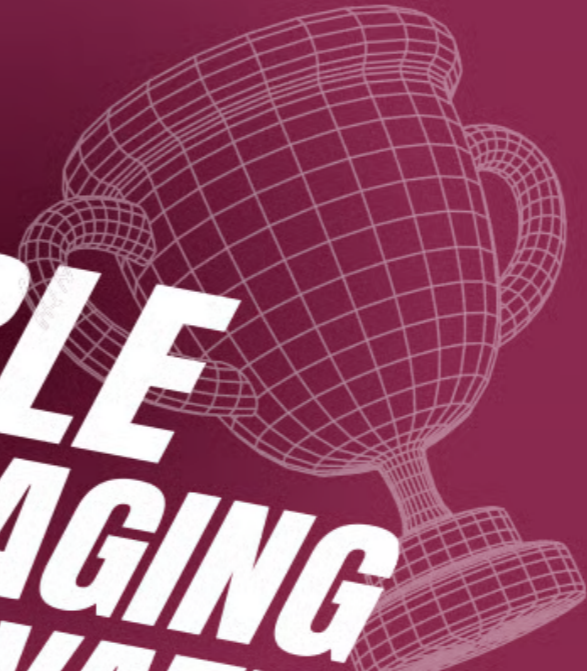


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1. Applebee's adds Grilled Cheese Cheeseburger to 2 for \$25 meal deal
2. KFC comeback era continues with the relaunch of Original Honey BBQ chicken
3. Culver's brings back CurderBurger
4. Hillshire Farm's freezer debut: Meat-packed croissants and sandwiches
5. North Country Smokehouse expands organic charcuterie lineup



MOST-POPULAR FEATURES:

1. Cargill identifies 'Big Four' steak cuts as menu must-haves
2. Consumers favoring pre-sliced deli meat
3. NCBA raises alarm over Argentine beef import plan, citing foot-and-mouth disease risk
4. 2025 Top 100 Meat and Poultry Processors: Record meat sales fuel growth
5. The hidden cost of clean labels: Why traditional food safety methods are failing



1. Episode 213: KC Cattle Co. CEO Patrick Montgomery discusses the new Wagyu Bacon Cheeseburger Bratwurst
2. Episode 212: Beef market insights with Virginia Tech's Mario Ortez
3. Episode 211: Butterball Togetherness Report results with Director of Insights Dennis Traver
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5. Episode 209: Carnal owner and co-founder James Zamory discusses the brand's new meat snack products

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THE NATIONAL PROVISIONER'S 2025 STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

NOVEMBER
11, 2025
2:00 PM EST

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As a complement to The National Provisioner's 2025 State of the Industry Report, this exclusive webinar will spotlight fresh insights from consumer research leader Circana. Join Chris DuBois, Executive Vice President & Perimeter Practice Leader, as he breaks down what's fueling – and what's stalling – growth across the protein category. From shifting consumer priorities to evolving definitions of "value," you'll gain actionable takeaways to help your business stay competitive in today's challenging marketplace and prepare for opportunities in 2026.

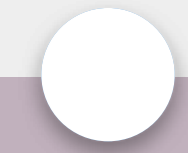
LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- Uncover consumer expectations: Explore how today's shoppers define "value" and how those perceptions are shaping innovation in protein.
- Identify what drives purchases: Learn which value propositions are most effective in motivating meat and poultry buyers.
- Leverage spending shifts: Understand the latest consumer food spending trends and discover strategies to position your business for stronger growth in the year ahead.

SPEAKER



CHRIS DUBOIS
Executive Vice President,
Perimeter Practice Leader
Circana





PRICE AND CONVENIENCE MOTIVATE CONSUMERS

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For many consumers, economic uncertainty due to the cost of living – with food prices figuring in significantly – is their new normal. Consumers are cost-conscious, with many lower- and middle-income shoppers finding private-label brands an attractive value proposition due to price and quality. In tandem with that, higher-income consumers continue to fuel markets for premium products, as seen with the popularity of USDA Certified Prime beef

And from the top to the bottom and all points in between, consumers feel time crunched and are consistently open to paying for convenience, whether it's a value-added meat or poultry product or the packaging it comes in.

Check out our Consumer Trends Report for an overview of these and other emerging consumer trends.

Also, don't miss our Processor Profile of Tolland, Conn.-based The Country Butcher.



FRED WILKINSON

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CONSUMERS KEEP AN EYE ON PRICE AND CONVENIENCE

CONSUMERS CONTINUE FAVORING GRINDS AND OTHER VALUE-ADDED MEAT AND POULTRY PRODUCTS.

BY FRED WILKINSON
CHIEF EDITOR

Despite price increases, consumers are spending a lot of money on food and beverage; with consumer spending in the category reaching \$1.69 trillion last year.

[Circana retail sales data analysis](#) of September 2025 meat department sales found inflation across a number of proteins fueling an overall increase of 5.4% for meat and poultry prices.

Through September, total retail food and beverage unit sales for 2025 were up slightly (+0.7%) but fell to zero gains in the third quarter. In September, dollar sales growth slowed to 2%, while unit sales declined 0.5%.

While cost concerns have consumers cooling on restaurant spending, they are shifting their purchases to more affordable options, Melissa Rodriguez, Circana principal, said during a recent [Meat Institute webinar](#), noting that 41% of adults say they want more protein in their diet.

Consumers continue prioritizing convenience as well, with Circana research suggesting more than half of dinner occasions require less than 15 minutes of preparation, attracting more consumers to the value-added meat category. Consumer demand for grinds grew \$2 billion over the last year, Rodriguez said.

She noted beef sirloin, chicken thighs, beef ribeye, dinner sausage, pork ribs and dried meat snacks also are standing out as popular meat products with consumers.

Circana notes that ground beef sales have been extremely strong all year, with September seeing the category bring \$ 1.4 billion in sales, up 13% year-on-year. While mostly price driven, pounds sold for ground beef also grew slightly (1%). Though much smaller in volume, ground chicken boasted a strong 27.8% increase in sales

Beef's reign continues, generating \$3.4 billion in September 2025, up by double digits in dollar sales while pound sales grew 1.9%. Only chicken had higher pound gains in September, up 3.5%. In the full-year view, beef volume sales grew 5.3%, distantly followed by chicken, at 3.1%.

"Beef is not just having a moment, it is growing a momentum," Anne-Marie Roerink, principal, 210 Analytics, said during a presentation at [Certified Angus Beef's Beef Bash 2025 event](#) in Austin, Texas. "We're seeing very high consumption of beef across all areas of the country, all demographics."



Erin Borrer (from left), vice president, economic analysis, US Meat Export Federation; Anne-Marie Roerink, principal, 210 Analytics; and Cody Jones, vice president, international, at Certified Angus Beef, discuss consumer trends during a presentation at Certified Angus Beef's Beef Bash 2025 event in Austin, Texas. Photo credit: Fred Wilkinson

CLEAN-LABEL MOMENTUM

Circana research finds more brands and retailers are announcing the removal of select artificial ingredients and additives from their products.

Valerie Rasmussen, vice of marketing and communications for Country Natural Beef, said the marketer of beef produced using regenerative practices and no antibiotics or added growth hormones or promotants continues to see an interesting dynamic in the beef market right now.

"Many shoppers are trading down on their grocery list in order to save money," Rasmussen said. "But there is another segment of shoppers who refuse to compromise their values when it comes to their core purchases and staples."

She said beef is a rare opportunity to align the self-care aspects of flavorful protein with more altruistic purchase drivers like animal welfare, sustainability and supporting local communities.

"Despite higher overall prices, Country Natural Beef ranchers are seeing shoppers that align with our mission of doing better for people, planet and animals, even in times of higher prices," she said.

THE GLP-1 EFFECT

Consumer adoption of [GLP-1 weight-loss drugs](#) is changing the eating habits of millions of Americans. Recent research published by the Beef Checkoff indicates that while these households spend slightly less on groceries and dining out, they prioritize protein-rich purchases such as beef.

Rasmussen said consumers -- especially health-conscious consumers -- are interested in where their food comes from, even as they become more budget-conscious.

"Recent trend reports have indicated we may have peaked on the protein craze," she said. "I would argue that natural protein-rich, nutrient-dense foods will never go out of style. In fact, many see food purchases as an investment in their families' long-term health."

FOODSERVICE INSPIRATION

The ongoing trend of consumers seeking to re-create at home new flavors and culinary styles they've enjoyed at [foodservice](#) is spotlighting global comfort foods -- from Caribbean dishes like Jamaican oxtail to Japanese beef sandos -- that deliver bold, high-impact flavors while using less-common, more economical cuts, Rasmussen said.

"These dishes are exciting because they combine global inspiration with sustainability through whole-animal utilization," she said. "As dining out costs rise, consumers are re-creating restaurant experiences at home, and these globally inspired, value-forward beef dishes fit perfectly. At the same time, trends around "food as medicine" are influencing shoppers who want meals that feel both nourishing and authentic."

[Consumer research](#) from FMI – The Food Industry Association reveals a significant shift in consumer dining habits: Consumers are increasingly choosing deli-prepared foods in place of restaurant meals, with this share more than doubling from 12% in 2017 to 28% in 2025.

FMI research finds more than half of Americans (53%) are taking a hybrid approach to meal creation, combining deli-prepared options with foods from their own kitchen.

"This shift reflects how shoppers are redefining value in food," said Allison Febrey, senior manager, research and insights at FMI. "They want meals that deliver on quality and variety but also save time and money. This trend is substantiated by the steady growth in retail foodservice dollar sales rising 1.6% to \$52.1 billion over the past 12 months."

Opening image credit: Getty Images / [Bombaert](#)

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THE COUNTRY BUTCHER: EXCELLENCE THROUGH FAITH, FAMILY AND PASSION



FROM HUMBLE BEGINNINGS TO AN AWARD-WINNING ARTISAN PROCESSOR, THE COUNTRY BUTCHER CONTINUES TO BLEND TRADITIONAL CRAFT WITH INNOVATION.

BY SAMMY BREDAR
ASSOCIATE GROUP EDITOR

Founded in 1989, Tolland, Conn.-based The Country Butcher has grown from a local shop into a nationally recognized artisan meat processor and retail butcher shop. The business has earned more than 100 regional and national awards, most recently securing a Grand Champion title for its Sausage, Peppers and Onion Patty at the 2025 American Cured Meat Championships in the experimental fresh class: Fresh Gourmet/Flavored Patty, among many other 2025 ACMC awards.

To further explore The Country Butcher's founding, guiding mission and continuing success, *The National Provisioner* spoke with Stephen Boyer, president and owner of The Country Butcher.

Boyer grew up on a small farm in New England, and as time went on, the family began processing more animals for neighbors. This eventually led Boyer and his father to build a mobile slaughtering unit, bringing their expertise door to door, or rather, farm to farm.



Boyer family at the 2025 ACMC. Photo courtesy of The Country Butcher.

Boyer continued to hone his craft and expertise, modernizing his operations and pursuing deep industry education. "Sometimes it was classes like at UConn or Penn State. They would have short courses, so I would take those to learn," he said.

Boyer also worked in a local slaughterhouse, refining his expertise and eventually growing his knowledge. "I went from the kill floor to the processing area where we used to bone beef and do retail cuts," he said. "And then I went into the sausage kitchen and worked in there. Then I worked on deliveries."

By working in each segment of the business, Boyer showcased his love for the meat industry. "They loved my passion to learn the business, and I had a passion to learn and how to do it correctly."

After a few years, Boyer branched out to work at retail, eventually opening his own retail store: The Country Butcher. "As I worked in other places, I always worked at night in my own shop," Boyer said. "I would work during the day and then come home at night. On the weekends, we would do any custom slaughtering that had to get done and then bring them to our shop. Then I would process them in the evenings."

Boyer opened his own store in 1989, a business built on passion for the meat industry and a love for learning. Originally based in Ellington, Conn., The Country Butcher moved to its current operations at Spring Meadow Farm in Tolland, Conn., in 2007.

The Country Butcher has always been deeply rooted in its local community. Though the small town of Tolland was not quite ready for Boyer's business back in 1989, the town had enough housing and modernization to support the business in the early 2000s, leading the family to transition its operations.

As a Christian-run business, The Country Butcher places faith at the center of its business philosophy, especially guiding employee relations and customer service.

Strong customer service is key to The Country Butcher. "And we see it, especially since COVID, that people are so appreciative because when we wait on them, we take the time to really give extremely high-quality customer service," Boyer said.

Customer experience goes far beyond how employees engage with customers; brick-and-mortars themselves can make or break how the customer feels while shopping in the store. With its move to Tolland, The Country Butcher has been able to uniquely customize its operations, emphasizing a comfortable environment. "The inside of our shop is decorated with a lot of antique farm and meat equipment. We have porches that go around with rocking chairs in the front for the customers," Boyer noted. "It's very welcoming."

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The Country Butcher combines its high-quality, attentive customer service with extremely knowledgeable staff. "We love to hand out recipes all the time and give people tips and ideas ... and we found that that's been a huge help because people appreciate learning something, appreciate learning how to cook a cut of meat or sausage correctly, and it enhances the quality of their meal that they're going to have too," Boyer said. "We want everything to be as positive as it can be."

Local pride is a key component of The Country Butcher's philosophy, supporting marathons, the local high school, Boy Scouts and more. "Personally, we do a lot with local soup kitchens and donate a lot of meat to help them get through tough times," Boyer noted. "There's a Northwest Food Bank, and we do a lot of donations with that and different soup kitchens in the area, just to try to help out."

Boyer is grateful to the Pennsylvania Association of Meat Processors, The Country Butcher's local state affiliation. "My parents always taught us that if you take something from an organization, you have to give back," he said.



Nick Boyer with the Grand Champion award for Meat Snack Sticks. Photo courtesy of The Country Butcher.



Steve Boyer with the Reserve Champion award for Frankfurters, Wieners Coarse Ground. Photo courtesy of The Country Butcher.

When it comes to The Country Butcher's award-winning meat products, Boyer cites quality and attention to detail as key aspects of his innovations.

At the regional Cured Meat Championships in Pennsylvania, The Country Butcher secured 20 awards mostly consisting of Grand Champions and Reserve Grand Champions, going on to win six awards nationally at the 2025 American Cured Meat Championships.

Driven by a love of giving back and learning from like-minded processors, Boyer has served on the PAMP board for many years and served as association president in 2000. He has also served on the AAMP board.

Giving back is part of The Country Butcher's deep roots in Christianity, Boyer credits all of his success to God. "I do have to give 100% credit to the Lord for blessing us and blessing our business," Boyer said. "He allows us to do what we love, and He allows us to be able to make a living at this."

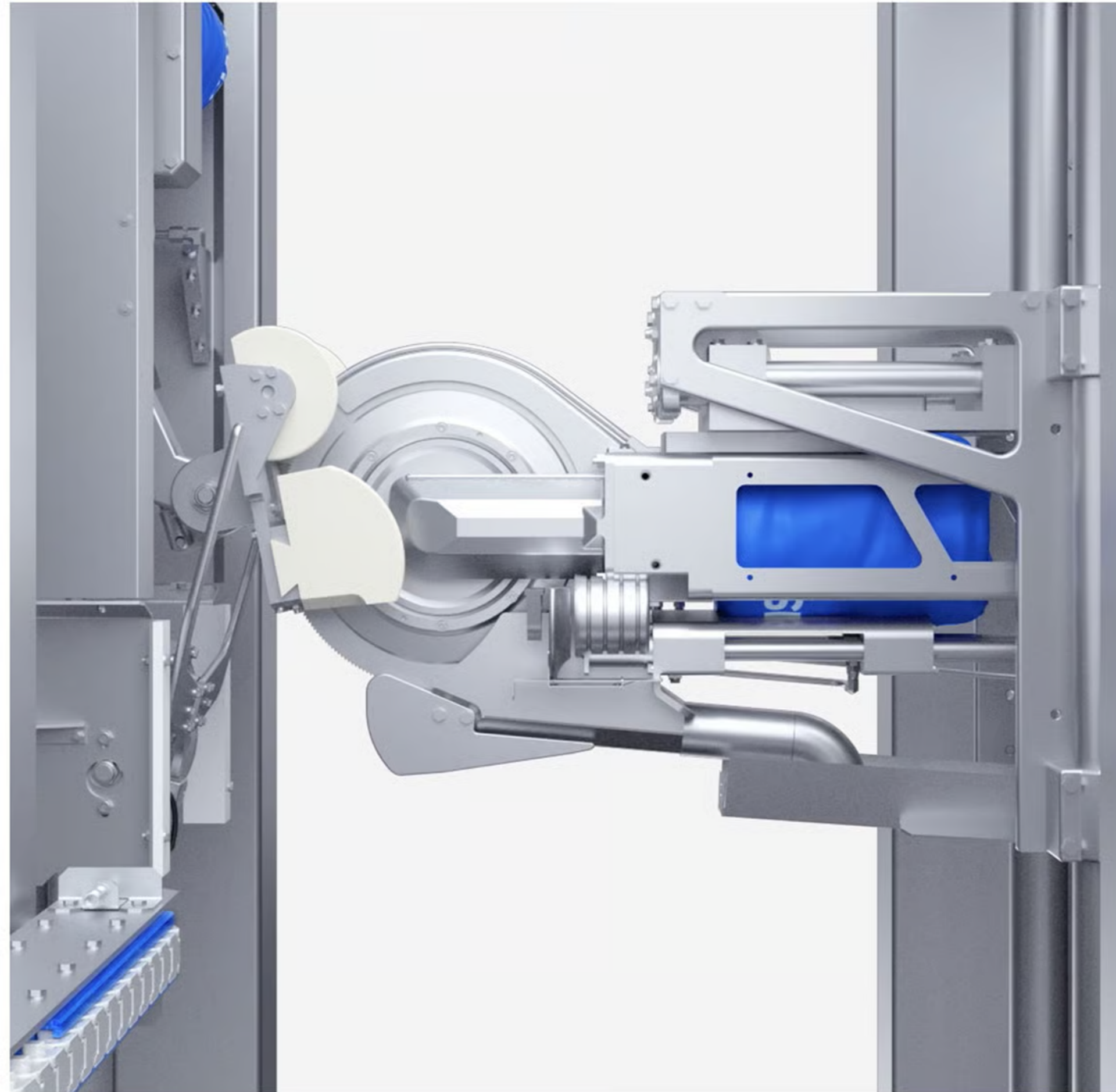
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ELEVATED FLAVORS SHAPE MEAT AND POULTRY INNOVATION

FLAVOR PROFILES LIKE SWEET HEAT, GLOBAL AND REGIONAL FLAVORS, AND NOSTALGIA CONTINUE TO DOMINATE THE MEAT AND POULTRY INDUSTRY.

BY SAMMY BREDAR
ASSOCIATE GROUP EDITOR

Flavor profiles like sweet heat, global and regional flavors, and nostalgia continue to dominate the meat and poultry industry. Alongside these favorites, elevated classics and unexpected mashups are capturing attention by consumers and product developers alike.

To further explore which flavor profiles and ingredients are trending for meat and poultry products, *The National Provisioner* spoke with Smithfield Foods, Kerry Group, Everson Spice and 210 Analytics.

SWEET HEAT AND GLOBAL INFLUENCES

Marianne Radley, managing director of marketing for Smithfield Foods, noted that sweet heat is particularly having a standout moment in the pork category, and is quickly growing in popularity among Gen Z consumers and on the TikTok app.

"This trend inspired our latest innovation – Smithfield Mike's Hot Honey Bacon," Radley said. "By pairing Smithfield's signature hickory-smoked bacon with Mike's cult-favorite Sweet Heat, the collab unites two category icons while tapping directly into consumer demand for bold, unexpected flavors."

The rise of globally inspired and sweet heat flavor profiles is not a passing trend; rather, they signal a broader consumer appetite for adventurous flavor experiences.

The sweet heat trend is evolving into something more: fruit and heat. Cody Masters, VP sales and culinary, executive chef, Everson Spice Co./Lynn's Foods, calls this flavor evolution "complex heat." "Think of pairing a tropical fruit flavor with an on-trend heat source, with a degree of differentiation attached to the naming mechanism," Masters said. "Blends like 'Fire Roasted Pineapple & Serrano,' 'Zesty Habanero & Peach Chamoy' or 'Sweet Dill Pickle Chili Crisp,' are the types of names that are grabbing people's attention."

Nostalgia-driven innovations are evolving in a new way as well, driven by global and regional influences. "From AI-curated spice blends to third culture cuisine, this trend reflects a new kind of nostalgia – one that's personal, tech-enabled, and globally inspired," said Kerry Group's Shannon Coco, senior sales and marketing director, and Julie Beauchemin, strategic marketing manager. "Unlike past trends that focused on honoring or modernizing tradition, this is about rewriting it – where cultural memory meets digital tools, and authenticity is defined by the individual."

Global barbecue is also gaining popularity among consumers and processors alike, with Japanese and Korean barbecue driving growth, according to Datassential 2025.

Though these innovative flavor trends are getting a lot of attention in the meat and poultry industry, the classics are classics for a reason. Radley is seeing that consumers don't want to choose between trend and innovation; instead, they want both. She noted that these innovations can reimagine familiar formats and flavors in new ways that feel fresh to consumers.



Wasabi, Miso & Roasted Garlic Drumsticks. Photo credit: Everson Spice.



Herbed Garlic & Meyer Lemon Crusted Air Fried Lamb Chops, w. Balsamic Hot Honey Reduction.jpg. Photo credit: Everson Spice.

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GENERATIONAL SHOPPING TRENDS

Gen Z is gaining spending power, and their interest in TikTok is increasingly shaping flavor and product development.

"For instance, the popularity of crunchy textures right now, whether freeze-dried candy, honeycrisp apples or crispy grapes. That's something that can be brought into the meat department," said Anne-Marie Roerink, principal for 210 Analytics. Unique textures are an innovative way to add novelty to classic products.

Roerink noted that Gen Z and millennial shoppers over index for LATAM and Mexican foods, as well as Caribbean, Mediterranean and Asian cuisines. "Boomers most certainly enjoy tacos and the more mainstream Mexican/LATAM items, while you see a much broader range of items and countries in the Millennial meal lineup, including items like birria or barbacoa," she said.

This regional trend extends to Asian cuisines, with younger consumers exploring options like gyukatsu and Korean barbecue, as well as other local dishes. "This will influence how the meat is cut and presented as well as the different flavors featured in value-added meat and poultry items," Roerink said.

In addition to TikTok inspiration, foodservice continues to influence retail meat and poultry trends. Roerink noted that when foodservice format CAVA added lamb meatballs to its menu, retail interest in ground lamb grew accordingly. "The interest in thin-cut meat directly relates back to the popularity of pho, ramen, hot pot and other Asian dishes that are hugely popular in foodservice right now," she said.



Smithfield Mike's Hot Honey Bacon on sausages. Photo credit: Smithfield.

LOOKING AHEAD

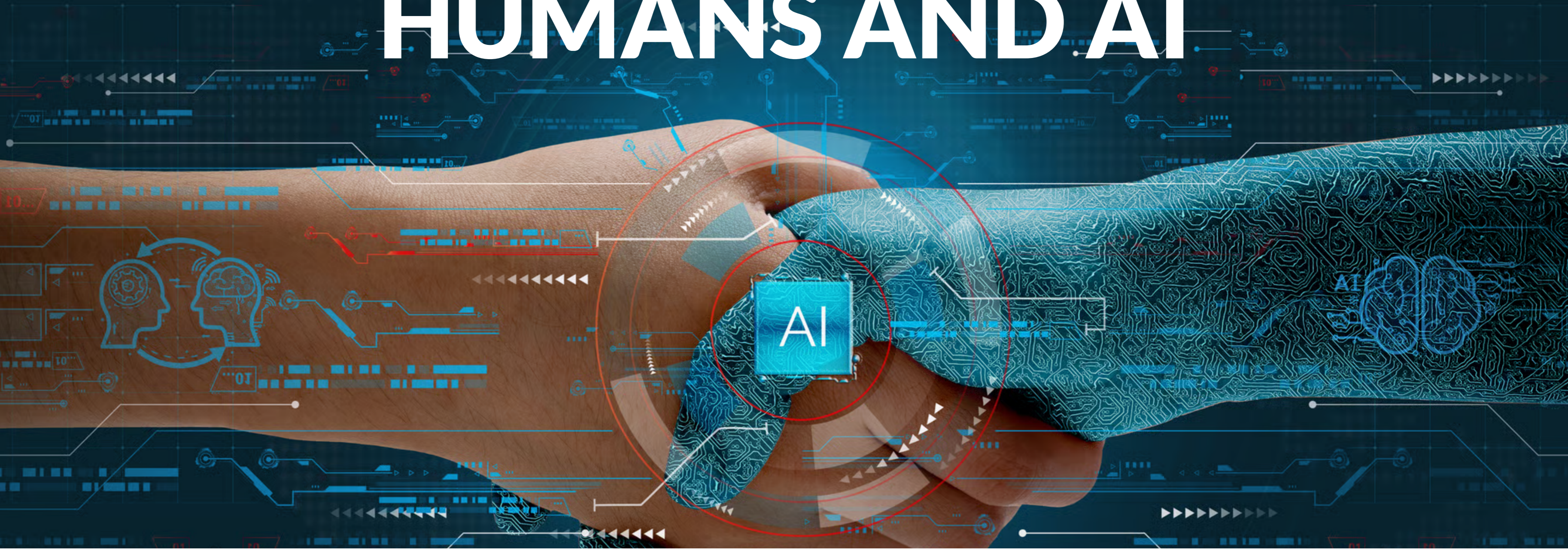
The comfort food trend is growing in popularity, largely driven by the quickening pace of macro changes, said Coco and Beauchemin. Traditional cooking techniques continue their enduring popularity, but "Consumers are gravitating to new wood species callouts beyond the traditional hardwood and in a recent Kerry Proprietary Research study, ranked Applewood, Maple Wood, and Hickory as their top 3 most desired wood types used." Coco and Beauchemin anticipate interest in different types of wood combined with popular flavor profiles.

Looking ahead, Radley anticipates continued interest in sweet and spicy offerings, as well as global influences. "The future of flavor lies in mashups that feel approachable yet surprising so consumers can explore new taste experiences without losing the comfort and familiarity of the foods they already love," she said.

Masters anticipates future interest in meat and poultry products inspired by Southeast Asian street foods and snacks. "Not only in terms of the flavors, but also in aesthetics," he said. Masters added that the best way to understand meat trends is by observing the snack category. He sees potential in street-food-inspired "sticky" coatings, adding both flavor and sensory appeal for adventure-seeking consumers.

Opening photo credit: Smithfield

FABRICATING THE LINE BETWEEN HUMANS AND AI



REGULATORY QUESTIONS ARISE AS ADVANCED IMAGING AND AI ANALYSIS REDEFINE WHAT 'INSPECTION' MEANS.

BY SHAWN K. STEVENS
FOOD INDUSTRY COUNSEL LLC

As we reflect on the recent government shutdown, and consider which federal employees are “essential,” questions will invariably arise regarding the critical roles that government regulators play, and whether those roles can be streamlined or accomplished with fewer employees.

For decades, USDA inspection has been the immutable constant of American meat processing, with human hands and eyes inspecting every carcass on every shift. But, could the rise of advanced imaging and AI analysis eventually redefine what “inspection” means? Indeed, computer vision systems already outperform the human eye at detecting subtle discoloration, bruising or surface defects. High-resolution hyperspectral cameras can “see” beyond visible light, identifying contamination, bone fragments or residual fecal material at the pixel level. When combined with AI models trained on thousands of validated inspection datasets, these systems could potentially assess, flag, and record conditions with a consistency no human could sustain throughout a grueling shift.

While the USDA has not embraced an automated inspection regime, it’s not unthinkable that the next evolution could involve hybrid oversight, where inspectors supervise intelligent imaging systems, rather than inspecting every carcass themselves. Indeed, AI could theoretically perform continuous visual monitoring, automatically verifying compliance parameters and logging digital inspection records in real time, while flagging potential defects for closer examination by human inspectors.

Could the same prove true on the fabrication floor? Indeed, processors could also, theoretically, turn to automation and artificial intelligence, not necessarily to eliminate humans, but to enhance precision and control. Robotic fabrication systems, equipped with advanced vision sensors and automation, could be used to identify muscle and bone boundaries with remarkable accuracy, perhaps, within millimeters, enabling precise, repeatable cuts that could maximize carcass yields while minimizing waste. What required decades of craftsmanship in the past, could be encapsulated in machines and encoded in software, refined by millions of data points, which would continuously learn and evolve.

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The promise of “human-in-the-loop” automation could be particularly powerful for beef processing. Instead of relying entirely on fully autonomous robots, hybrid systems could combine machine precision with human judgment. A single technician could oversee multiple robotic stations, guiding them through complex cuts while the underlying AI learns continuously from each interaction. The result: safer work environments, more consistent product, and higher throughput even in tight labor markets.

Artificial intelligence could also find its way deeper into quality control and food safety. Machine-learning algorithms trained on thousands of production images could flag subtle deviations, such as a hairline crack in an equipment weld, a misaligned slicer blade, or a temperature anomaly in a chilling tunnel, long before they become safety risks. Paired with robotic sampling, and/or real-time microbial detection, processors could potentially move from reactive testing to predictive prevention.

In the end, AI and robotics have the potential to make establishments faster and smarter. And, when the fabrication line, itself, begins to notice, learn, and correct issues, the next frontier of meat processing won't necessarily be about automation replacing people, it will be about artificial intelligence augmenting them.

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CURED COLOR DEVELOPMENT WITH CLEAN-LABEL INGREDIENTS



IMMEDIATE THERMAL PROCESSING WITH INCLUSION OF A CURE ACCELERATOR WAS DETERMINED TO BE OPTIMAL FOR CURED COLOR FORMATION AND STABILITY.

The balancing act between meeting consumer demands for clean label and maintaining the same quality afforded by conventional ingredients can be tricky to navigate for meat processors. While the process of meat curing seems simple on the surface, the reality is that it relies on a complex series of chemical reactions, ultimately resulting in the conversion of myoglobin (unstable pigment in fresh meat) to nitrosyl hemochrome (stable pigment in cured meat). In conventional formulations this typically relies on the addition of nitrite (NO_2) in the form of sodium nitrite (NaNO_2), while in clean label formulations NO_2 is incorporated in the form of pre-converted celery or beet powders [high in nitrate (NO_3) and fermented to NO_2].

An interesting aspect of these reactions is that color has to worsen before it improves. Upon incorporation of NO_2 , myoglobin will first oxidize to a gray/brown pigment form known as metmyoglobin- NO_2 . It then must be reduced through either sufficient holding time and/or addition of a reducing agent such as sodium erythorbate (conventional) or acerola cherry powder (clean label) prior to thermal processing to optimize cured color.

Researchers at Northwest Missouri State University and University of Arkansas sought to understand how conventional and clean label curing and reducing agents would fare in pork sausages containing encapsulated citric acid. Formulation with chemical acidulants is often done in the production of semi-dry sausages like summer sausage, and these ingredients also function as cure accelerators. The study aimed to determine the optimal conditions for formulation and processing to achieve desirable, stable cured color in both conventional and clean label products in a product type that differs considerably in pH and composition from what has already been well-studied (e.g., emulsified pork sausage).

In the investigation, sausages were formulated with conventional NaNO_2 or clean label celery or beet powders to the same targeted concentration of ingoing NO_2 . Formulations then included either no cure accelerator, conventional sodium erythorbate, or clean label cherry powder. All formulations included 1.0% encapsulated citric acid and had a resulting pH of ~4.9. Prior to thermal processing, sausages were either held overnight in a cooler or were immediately cooked.

Samples of the raw mixture were collected from each formulation. At the time the cook began, the mixtures that were held overnight with a cure accelerator were considerably more red than the mixtures that had just been prepared. Conversely, in the finished product, sausages that were promptly mixed, stuffed, and cooked had more intense cured color than those that were held. The most intense, stable cured color was achieved through immediate thermal processing in sausages formulated with sodium erythorbate or cherry powder, regardless of the source of NO_2 .

The team concluded that:

1. Clean label sources of NO_2 (pre-converted celery and beet) result in similar color to conventional NaNO_2 when formulated to the same level of ingoing NO_2 .
2. Although encapsulated citric acid itself functions as a cure accelerator, the inclusion of an additional cure accelerator, either sodium erythorbate in conventional or cherry powder in clean label formulations, can result in an additional benefit to color.
3. Holding chemically acidulated sausages overnight allows for oxidized metmyoglobin- NO_2 to be reduced. This does not, however, result in more intense cured color in the finished product. The researchers speculated that this was either the result of some loss of moisture (and therefore water-soluble myoglobin) in the cooler and/or premature denaturation of meat proteins through interaction with the citric acid.

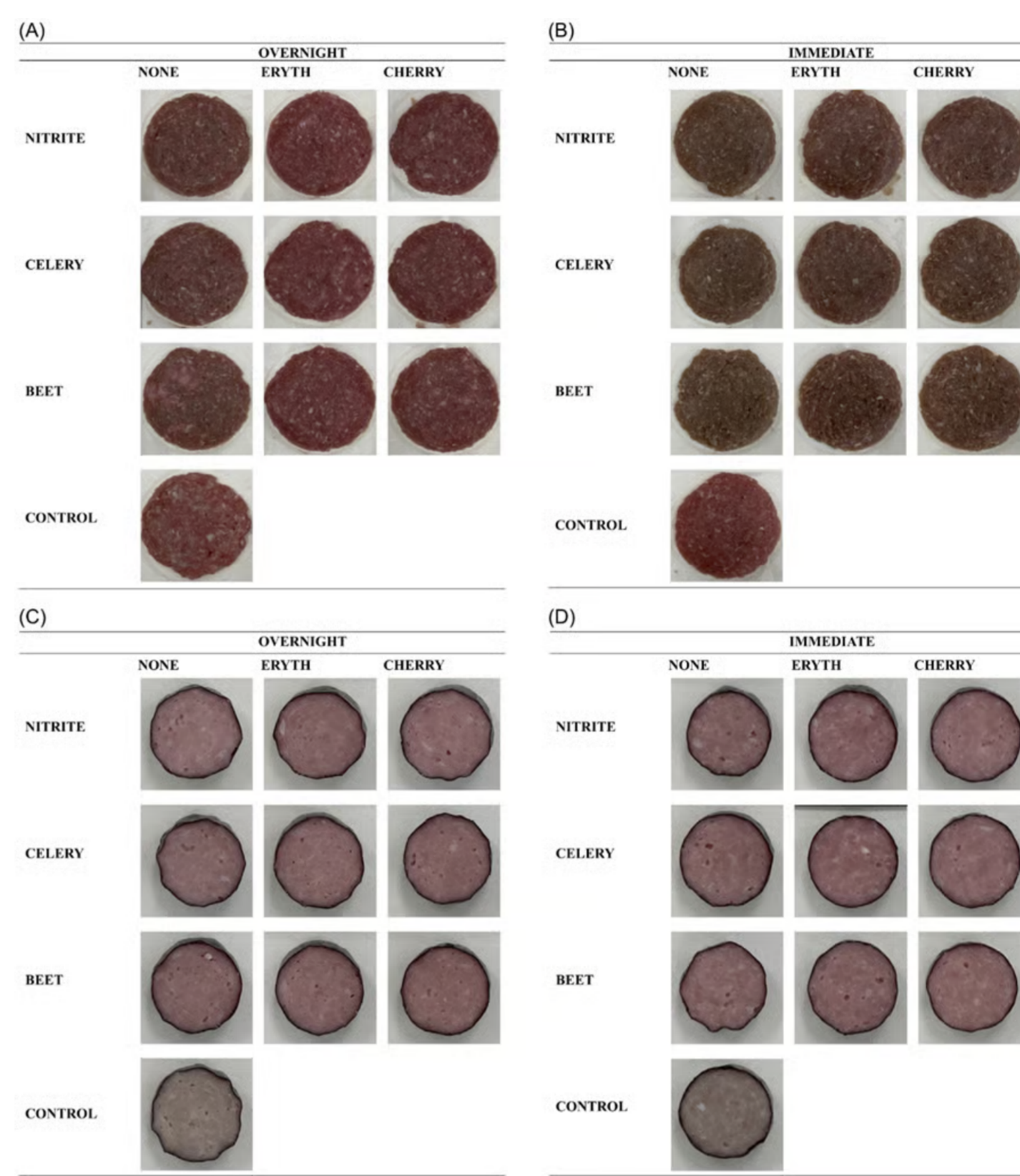
Immediate thermal processing of this product type with the inclusion of a cure accelerator was determined to be optimal for cured color formation and stability, regardless of whether the formulation was conventional or clean label.

To read the full study: <https://www.iastatedigitalpress.com/mmb/article/id/20106/>

Tuell, J. R., Francis, H., Bentz, S., Pitti, A. R., Denzer, M. L. & Setyabrata, D., (2025) "Color Development of Direct Acidified Pork Sausage Containing Alternative Curing and Reducing Agents", *Meat and Muscle Biology* 9(1): 20106, 1-18.

doi: <https://doi.org/10.22175/mmb.20106>

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Pork sausage when (A) OVERNIGHT, raw; (B) IMMEDIATE, raw; (C) OVERNIGHT, cooked; and (D) IMMEDIATE, cooked.

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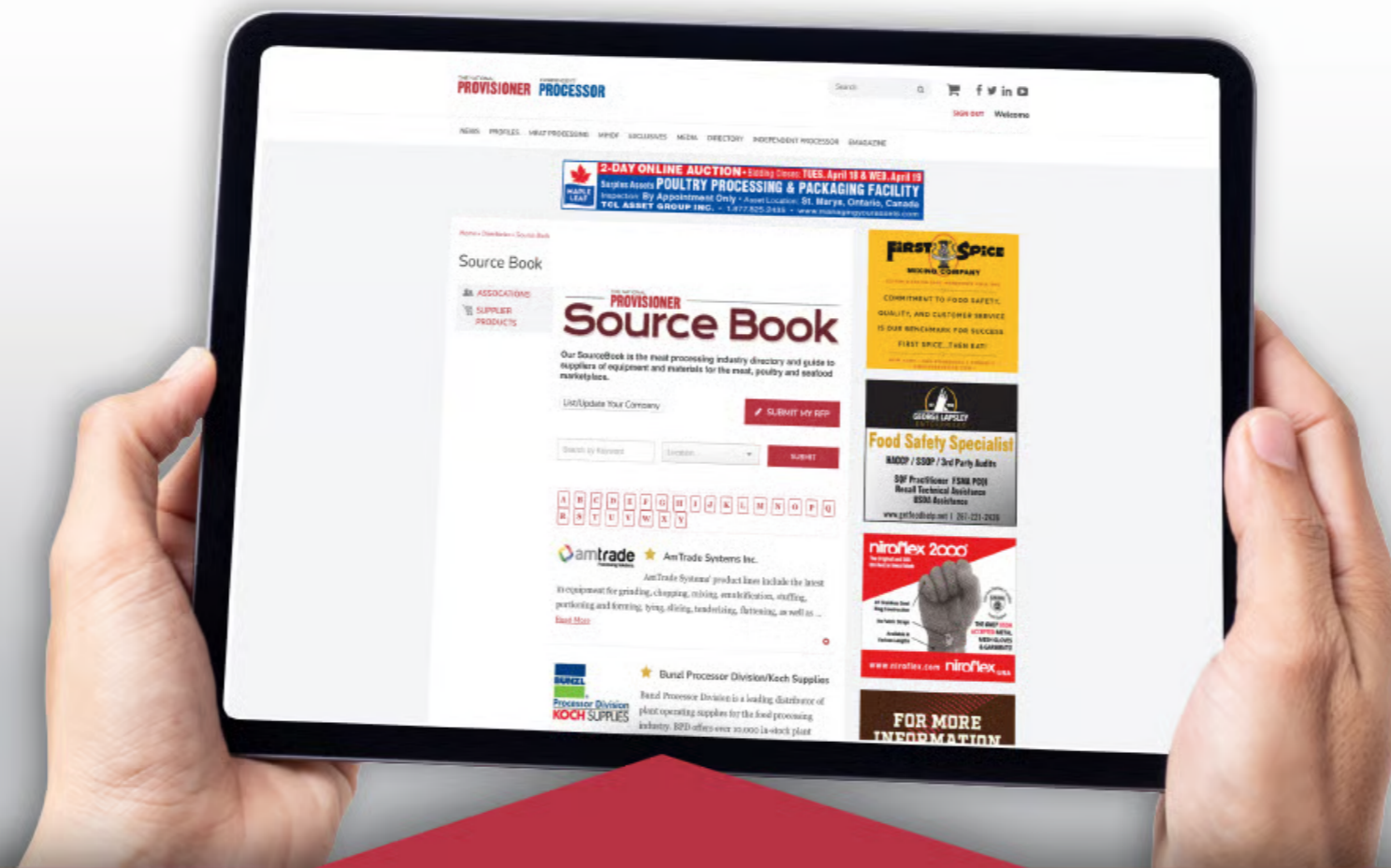
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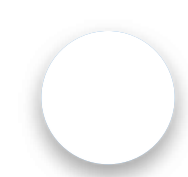
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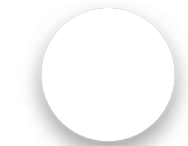
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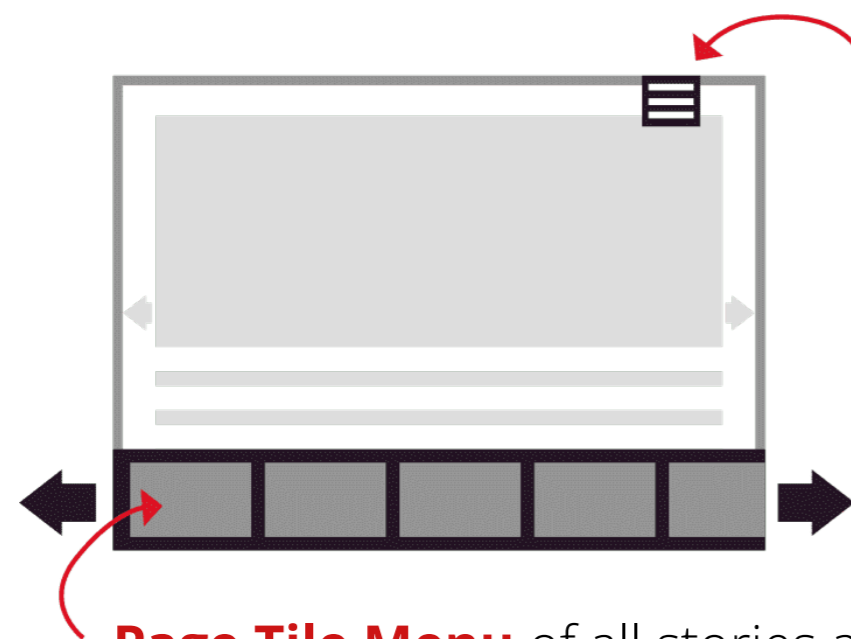
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