

MEAT & POULTRY \$\$ AND UNITS UP

Center-plate proteins are thriving as consumers stay away from restaurants in droves. Convenience, value and comfort items are helping, too.

BY APRIL MILLER

Frozen meat and poultry both scored dollar and unit gains in the 12 weeks ended Sept. 6, 2009, according to supermarket data from Information Resources, Inc., the Chicago-based market research firm. That's unusual, given the 1.2% dollar gain and 0.3% unit loss for the frozen department as a whole during the period.

Poultry in particular was in abundant supply: Volume was ahead 6.2%, units gained 4.2% while dollars climbed only 2.0%. While the dominant chicken and chicken substitutes segment

eked out a 0.8% dollar gain, the real action was in turkey and turkey substitutes, which were ahead 7.2%.

High fliers in the turkey/turkey substitute segment included Jennie-O Turkey store (up 47.1% to \$6,529,154), Honeysuckle White (up 51.3% to \$4,765,517) and Zacky Farms (up 74.1% to \$2,893,076). Private label, which drives the chicken sub-category, was up by

3.0% to \$124,944,000. Gainers in the segment included Perdue Perfect Portions (up 6.6% to \$15,931,006), Perdue (up 5.0% to \$12,859,412), Country Store (up 7.9% to \$6,332,128), Gold Leaf (up 60.9% to \$7,617,644) and Tender Bird (up 55.5% to \$5,684,156).

MEAT AHEAD 4.2%

In the meat category, dollars rose by 4.2% to \$352,224,896, although units were up only 1.6% and volume was essentially flat at -0.1%. The big success story here was meat substitutes, which jumped 6.8% to \$58,110,732. Morningstar Farms drove the numbers here, with a 12.8% gain to \$25,200,908. Boca Burgers plummeted 20.5% to \$9,329,050. Gardenburger skyrocketed 108.1% to \$4,164,934.

The meat (no poultry) subcategory was up by 4.2%, with double-digit gains from private label, Steak-Umm, Great Range and Tony Roma's. Bubba Burger, second only to private label, scored a healthy 8.4% gain to \$24,453,790.

Comfort food, value and larger size bags to bring families back to the table are the three trends most impacting the processed poultry industry, says Carrie Johnston, Advance Brands' (www.advance-brands.com) Fast

Fixin' brand manager.

With consumers increasingly choosing to cook at home versus eating out, comfort food-type items meet people's need to feel they're preparing a quality meal for their family, explains Johnston.

"Economic factors are leading consumers to look for great value in their purchase," she adds. "Consumers are more educated and savvy

about their food choices — their expectations with the quality of products, and the variety of choices they have is higher than ever."

Fast Fixin' Expands

To meet the demand for value and quality, the Edmond, Okla.-based company expanded its Fast Fixin' line with the addition of a Buffalo popcorn chicken and Buffalo chicken frie, a home-style meatball and a "mini" cheeseburger. Its existing "Bonus Bag" line-up was also expanded, offering consumers 10% to 15% more product than the current value bag item.

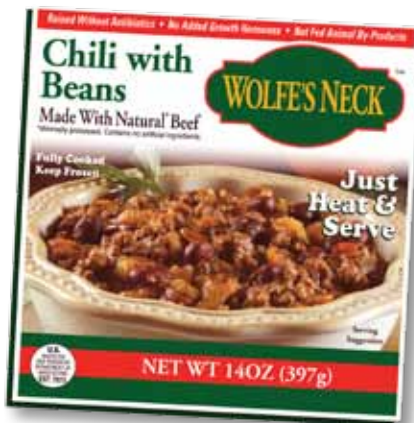
"Buffalo continues to be among the top profiles among consumers, so it was a natural extension," explains Johnston. "Mini sandwiches and burgers are proven successes on today's foodservice menus, so the timing is right for additions to our sandwich line."

Meeting the demand for comfort foods, the company's launches from its more center-of-the-plate Fast Classics line include a new line of burgers (including a cheeseburger and Vidalia onion profile) and two boneless wings with Asian and Buffalo sauce packets.

She recommends focusing on larger sizes and "meal deal" bundling to offer value to families. She notes that consumers are tending to shop less often but purchase in



Applegate Farms gluten-free chicken nuggets are all-natural and microwavable.



Pineland Farms says its Wolfe's Neck items respond especially well to demos.

larger quantities, so “family size or ‘X% free’ offerings are getting attention due to the perceived value.

Johnston also urges providing variety with trusted brands, focusing on items that drive sales and delisting slow movers. “Develop internal retail programs which manufacturers can participate in to increase sales. Programs supported by the retailer are proven to be more successful than programs driven by the food manufacturers,” concludes Johnston.

Bob Evans’ Express

New products in the meat and poultry categories abound from a variety of manufacturers. In September, Bob Evans Farms (www.bobevans.com), Columbus, Ohio, launched its Express fully cooked turkey sausage patties. With eight patties to the box, they carry a suggested retail of \$2.79. “Ready in minutes in the microwave, they have the great taste you’d expect from Bob Evans with the benefits of turkey,” says Nancy Cowen, senior director