



Mushrooms

By Andy Nelson

AS MORE CONSUMERS LOOK FOR PROTEIN ALTERNATIVES TO MEAT, demand for fresh mushrooms continues to surge. And new products from industry leaders are keeping the category vibrant.

Leamington, Ontario-based Highline Mushrooms has two new products rolling out this summer that will get the attention of the entire industry: a new product designed specifically for the grill and all-clear, eco-friendly packaging.

Highline's limited edition White Grill Caps were introduced to North American retailers just in time for the 4th of July, said Devon Kennedy, the company's national marketing manager.

Portabellas have traditionally been the go-to grilling mushroom. Large white mushrooms offer a different take on the theme, Kennedy said. Portabellas add flavor, whereas white mushrooms absorb the flavors of the foods they're cooked and served with.

Highline's growers have tried large white mushrooms in the past, but Highline's new product, which comes in a 4-count pack, is "fairly new" to North American retailers, Kennedy said.

White Grill Caps are both a perfect accompaniment to grilled meats or, for vegetarians, a perfect meat substitute, she added.

The caps retain their firmness while absorbing the smoky flavors of the grill, resulting in a mouth-watering culinary experience.

And their delicate texture and earthy flavor, Kennedy said, make them good for a standalone dish or as a veggie burger.

The natural umami flavors of the mushrooms add depth and richness to any recipe, while their low-calorie and fat-free nature make them a nutritious option for health-conscious individuals.

"It's a trial right now but we'll likely keep it going all year," Kennedy said.

Eco-friendly packs

Highline's other big news this summer is the announcement that it's shifting its packaging from brown and blue tills with plastic overwraps to clear punnets and tills that are 100% recyclable, Kennedy said.

Switching to all sustainable packaging is a natural for a mushroom grower like Highline. Mushrooms are among the most sustainable crops – grown in the dark with no artificial light needed and with much less water than other crops.

The second benefit of the all-clear packs is that it will allow Highline to highlight the quality of its products. Mushrooms can't have dirt on them, for instance, or shoppers will see it, Kennedy said.

The old produce department adage that "people buy with their eyes" definitely applies to mushrooms, and with clear packaging, that's even more the case, she added.

The new packs will empower Highline's more than 2,000 harvesters to deliver the most high-quality product they can and to have it fully appreciated, Kennedy said.

Mushrooms are packed in clear retail packs in places including Europe and Australia, she added, but the concept is fairly new to North America.

Value-added meal solutions

Blandon, Pa.-based Giorgio Fresh's new product development is focused on expanding its stuffed mushroom line, which gives consumers a variety of delectable flavors and eliminates the need for extensive prep work in meal production, said Bryan Shelton, Vice President of Sales & Marketing, Giorgio Fresh Co.

"With their convenient heat-and-serve cooking method, enjoying a delicious mushroom-based dish has never been easier," Shelton said.

Giorgio Fresh stays ahead of trends in the fresh mushroom business by prioritizing organic and sustainable farming practices, promoting mushrooms as a meat alternative, highlighting their health benefits, offering diverse mushroom varieties, and providing convenient options like sliced mushrooms, Shelton added.

"We invest in research and development, market analysis, and consumer insights to adapt our products and strategies to meet evolving customer demands and maintain their industry leadership."

Produce: mushrooms



Having a diverse roster of varieties is one key to Giorgio Fresh's marketing plan at retail.

When it comes to merchandising and marketing fresh mushrooms at retail, Highline is taking a cue from other produce commodities and working with a consultant on coming up with "one key message" about mushrooms that will stick in consumers' minds.

Marketers of blueberries, for instance, saw sales skyrocket when they started attaching the word "antioxidants" to their product, Kennedy said. For mushrooms, there are a number of good candidates: nutrition, versatility and meat replacement, for example.

"Mushrooms are very approachable and friendly, and they go with everything," she said. "You can pair it with the steak, or it can replace the burger. We want to see mushrooms become more of a staple."

According to one study, mushroom lovers buy mushrooms about 17 times a year. Highline wants to see that rise to 52 times a year, and sees room for tremendous growth, Kennedy said.

For Giorgio Fresh, the key to successful merchandising is collaborating closely with its retail partners, Shelton said.

Key aspects of great merchandising, he said, include eye-catching displays, strategic placement, quality assurance, education, and promotional support.

Giorgio Fresh and its partners aim to create visually appealing displays, position mushrooms effectively, maintain high quality, educate retail staff and consumers, and execute promotional campaigns.

"This collaboration drives sales, enhances the shopping experience, and reinforces the appeal of fresh mushrooms as a versatile ingredient," Shelton said. "Mushrooms can be incorporated into a wide range of dishes, spanning appetizers, entrees, and even desserts." Whether grilled, roasted, sautéed, or used raw in salads, he added, mushrooms add depth and flavor to any culinary creation.

Giorgio Fresh



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