



**Allen Seidner**, Natural Foods Merchandiser

Aug. 24, 2010 4:28pm

## Three Tips for Dynamic Deli Sales

Are your deli sales flourishing or floundering? There are many ways to turn your store's foodservice operation into a magnetic and exciting customer destination. Here are a few ideas to whet your creative palate.

### **Develop a signature program.**

In your store, find a focus, nail it, polish it and shout about it. Well-executed hot bars get attention from customers who value portion-size options, efficiency and value.

Take, for example, New Leaf Community Markets stores in the Santa Cruz, Calif., area, which offer lunch and dinner "green-plate specials." With plenty of in-store signage and marketing, along with value-minded prices of \$5 for lunch and \$9.99 for dinner, "the program is a terrific branding tool, increasing sales in the deli and in other departments as well," says Nancy Weimer, New Leaf's foodservice director. "We're branding items so customers know they're getting Beeler's barbecued pork spareribs and Smart Chicken Parmesan—the brands they see in our store."

Briar Patch Food Co-op in Grass Valley, Calif., lures customers to the store's hot grilled-sandwich and burrito station by featuring unique ingredients and flavors. "We have signature items that customers have come to associate with our store," says General Manager Chris Maher. "We do our own organic, nitrate-free corned beef to make a corned-beef Reuben, using beef from a local provider."

Sole is frequently on the menu at New Morning Store in Woodbury, Conn. The deli's fish entree program has helped dinnertime sales soar. To tantalize palates, chef Carol Byer-Alcorace creates gourmet seafood dishes such as pistachio-crusting wild Alaskan salmon and corn-crusting scallops that customers pair with salads and rice dishes. Since the majority of her customers also shop at a nearby conventional supermarket,

Byer-Alcorace makes sure her dishes stand out by only serving species certified by the Marine Stewardship Council or Monterey Bay Aquarium's Seafood Watch program.

**Keep your merchandising as fresh and abundant at 6 p.m. as you do at noon.**

Too many deli managers sabotage their evening sales by under-producing or under-merchandising after lunchtime. If, like many stores, your busiest traffic is between 5 and 7 p.m., be sure your merchandising showcases a bounty of fresh dinner choices.

**Develop a range of products that address the special diets of your customers.**

If organic items are very popular in your store, be sure to include organic dishes in your foodservice offerings. Also consider dedicating items for vegetarian, vegan, raw, wheat-free or low-sodium diets.

At Good Earth Natural & Organic Foods in Fairfax, Calif., where I am a partner, our kitchen uses exclusively organic ingredients. From breakfast through closing time, customers devour more than 200 pounds a day from our hot bar — which has made it a destination for several hundred customers every day.

---

*Allen Seidner is a foodservice design and operations consultant at Thought For Food Consulting, and a partner at Good Earth Natural & Organic Foods in Fairfax, Calif.*

Copyright © 2011, Penton Media, Inc., NewHope360.com