

Mozzarella Company's 'Bright Spot' In Crisis Is Sales To Grocers, Keeping Staff

Dallas, TX—The Mozzarella Company, offering award-winning, hand-made cheese here since 1982, has been able to maintain its entire staff since the start of the coronavirus outbreak, albeit with fewer hours.

The Mozzarella Company did not receive a Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) or Economic Injury Disaster Loan Program, but is hoping to receive one during this latest round of federal funding.

"We have kept our entire cheese-making staff employed throughout the crisis," said Mozzarella Company founder Paula Lambert.

"We have not been making the pre-COVID amounts of cheese, but we have been making cheese - mostly fresh cheeses for the grocery stores and other sales."

The company has cut back on making cheese from four days a week to two days, so cheese makers are working fewer hours.

The Mozzarella Company typically produces about 200,000 pounds of cheese annually, with more than 40 available varieties of cheese.

"Our shipping manager has been working fewer hours, but filling in and running our retail store on Saturdays," she said. "We're very happy that we have been able to continue to operate and also that we have been able to continue supporting our local dairy farmers."

Most Customers Lost Mid-March

On March 27, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott confirmed that the state of Texas was under a statewide stay-at-home mandate.

First of all, we lost most of our customers, Lambert said.

"Nearly all the restaurants and hotels who buy from us regularly are either closed or doing only a tiny fraction of the business pre-COVID, so our sales to these customers have declined dramatically," she said.

"Also, our sales to most distributors have declined because their customers have either closed or their businesses have decline," Lambert said. "Our sales to airlines is currently non-existent."

"The only bright spot for us has been our sales to local and regional grocery stores," she said. "At the very beginning of

the crisis, the grocery stores were overwhelmed and were not ordering."

"Now things have settled down and they are increasing their cheese orders. And lastly, our sales to our own retail customers have picked up as we are offering curbside pickup," she said. "We're also selling much more via our website to retail customers both locally and across the country."

As of this week, the few restaurants that are doing well with their pickup meals are still ordering small amounts from us, and a few distributors have been placing orders, Lambert said.

Several caterers who are providing meals for hospital workers and first responders have also ordered cheese from us for the meals they are preparing, she said.

"We're hoping that as restaurants reopen, they will continue

to see the value in our artisanal cheeses and will order from us," Lambert said. "We're trying to stay in touch with our customers and have written letters to all our restaurant and hotel customers, asking how they are and telling them about how we have continued making a small amount of cheese and keeping our cheese makers working on a reduced sale."

Mozzarella Company immediately implemented steps to keep its employees and customers safe during the COVID-19 event. Although Texas's 10-person-or-less gathering rule is not being mandated for manufacturers, the company is observing it by taking the following steps:

- No more than six cheese makers scheduled at a time
- Increased physical distancing of seating in common areas such as break rooms, production facilities, and office spaces
- Limiting customers and screening any essential service people who require entry
- Wipes and/or sanitizers are available in common areas and used frequently, before and after anyone enters the premises

The company is also committed to educating employees on healthy behaviors and processes per CDC guidelines and inquire frequently on their well-being.

Mozzarella Company is working closely with its supply chain to mitigate potential service disruptions. The company developed a flexible schedule to allow operations to run smoothly.

Employees self-temperature check twice daily, and any employee who exhibits symptoms is not allowed in the workplace.

We are accustomed to operating in an already-stringent food safety environment, giving us a substantial head-start in dealing with sanitation and cleanliness, the company stated.

According to Lambert, a best-case scenario over the next several months would be "for our sales to return to pre-COVID sales, but we doubt this will happen."

"We would hope that sales will increase as restaurants and businesses reopen, and would hope that our customers will continue to recognize the value of our cheeses and buy even more than before," she said.

We would also hope that our website sales will continue to be strong, Lambert continued.

Finally, we recognize that the world has changed, hope to be able to be nimble and adjust to the changing times, she said.

For more information, visit www.mozzco.com.

This is the second in a regular series on how companies are coping with coronavirus, including their challenges and hard-fought victories in this new and insecure manufacturing environment.



PERSONNEL

JEFF KENT has been hired for the newly created role of vice president of sales for Maytag Dairy Farms, Newton, IA. Prior to joining Maytag Dairy Farms, Kent served as the senior vice president of cheese and butter at Foremost Farms. During his tenure at Foremost, he rose through the ranks, serving as director of sales and marketing as well as the national head of sales. Kent's experience also includes building brands Joseph Gallo Farms and Glanbia Foods. In his new vice president of sales role at Maytag, Kent's knowledge and vision will be focused on growth into new markets and with new customers nationwide.

RELCO, LLC of Willmar, MN, has promoted DUSTIN PFLIPSEN to supply chain director and member of the RELCO executive leadership team. Pflipsen brings over 28 years of food and dairy industry experience to his new role. Prior to joining RELCO, Pflipsen worked for Sun Opta Ingredients (formerly Northern Milk Products) as a maintenance and parts manager. In 2000, he joined RELCO as a project engineer, and was promoted to engineering manager for the Willmar office before being named general manager in 2017. In his new role, Pflipsen will provide strategic leadership and direction to the purchasing, estimating and after-market teams to ensure customer expectations in those capacities.

United Natural Foods, Inc. (UNFI) has named STACEY KRAVITZ the new president of UNFI Canada, effective Aug. 2, 2020. Kravitz, who currently serves as Canada's senior vice president of sales, will succeed PETER BRENNAN, who plans to retire at the end of the year. In her new role, Kravitz will oversee natural, organic and specialty distribution in Canada, and lead a sales, merchandising and supply chain organization of over 450 associates. She has over 25 years of leadership experience with companies such as Kraft Foods, Kraft Heinz Company and UNFI Canada.

DEATHS

Jerome "Jerry" Laack, 83, of Greenleaf, WI, passed away Tuesday, April 28, 2020, after complications from a stroke. Laack was the owner and operator of Jerry Laack Cheese in De Pere, WI.

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