



Pine River Pre-Pack Targets Younger Audience With New Cold Pack Flavors

Pine River Pre-Pack, Inc. is responding to one of the leading challenges in the cold pack cheese market: how to reinvent cold pack for younger consumers.

Through fiery and bold new flavors and simple product applications, Pine River is showing its younger audience that cold pack can be an everyday staple rather than something enjoyed at grandma's table during the holidays.

The cold pack cheese business has been stable at best in recent years. Per capita consumption of cold pack cheese foods and other cheese foods and spreads was 2.83 pounds in 2015 (the most recent year for which statistics are available), down from 2.97 pounds in 2014 but up from 2.73 pounds in 2013, according to USDA figures.

Per capita consumption of cold pack cheese was over three pounds for most years between 1995 and 2011, with a peak of 3.98 pounds in 1999.

US production of cold pack cheese and cheese foods totaled 37.8 million pounds in 2015, down from 44.2 million pounds in 2014 and the lowest production level since 2002, when output totaled 32.4 million pounds.

"It's an interesting niche market with a lot of opportunities for gourmet products from quality focused companies," said Pine River president Philip A. Lindemann, Jr.

While the older consumer demographic continues to drive sales, Pine River's innovative flavors are enticing younger customers, according to marketing director Mary Lindemann. The company is appealing to the younger generation's affinity for cooking – putting cold pack in different recipes.

"Also, since our spreads are made with whey, it is a good source of protein," Mary said. "That's a plus for health-conscious consumers."

When I go to trade shows, I share with customers that you can use cheese spread in any recipe that calls for a natural cut of cheese or heavy cream, she said. Your recipe is much smoother with the option to add flavor from our growing product line.

Cooking shows are also helping boost sales, Mary added. People are all about creating fun, tasty food at home and cheese spreads are an easy ingredient to enjoy in lots of recipes.

"Our Smoky Bacon is fantastic on a baked potato or mixed in with scrambled eggs. Cheese spreads can also be used in a lot of casseroles or is a great addition to any pasta dish," Mary said. "A newer flavor for Pine River, Chunky Bleu and Cheddar, enhances any steak, or use your favorite spread as a great dipping sauce for chicken wings or French fries."

"Our Spicy Beer Cold Pack is also great for soups," she continued. "It's all about breaking beyond the cracker."

"We're adding excitement to cold pack through social media outreach and adapting our product line," Phil said. "Bolder and hotter flavors are drawing a lot of attention when we exhibit at trade shows around the country."

"It's not our traditional consumers that are drawn to ghost pepper and habanero," he said. "It's the younger set with those taste buds that can eat fire."

Pine River's best-selling flavor continues to be its Port Wine

spread because of its nostalgia for every age group, Mary said. Kids and adults talk about having Port Wine spread at their grandmas' house during the holidays.

"Our fastest-growing flavor is Aged Asiago, though," Phil said. "That one is just shooting to the top."

"Special flavors are what's really going to grow the market," Phil said. "All the companies making cheese spread are coming up with crazy new flavors."

'Clean' Label For Cheese Spread

In response to the growth and importance of clean labels with consumers, Pine River introduced a gourmet line of clean cold packs in 2016 with four flavors; Hot Habanero, Garlic and Herb, Sharp Cheddar, and Port Wine.

"The drive for a clean label began with a trip to the Fancy Food Show, which we have been exhibiting for the last 10 years," Mary said. "They'd taste the cheese and say 'It's delicious' and look at the label and say 'Ugh – can you do it without preservatives?'"

Matching the extended shelf life of its traditional cold packs without the use of preservatives was a challenge for Pine River Pre-Pack.

"Our 23 employees worked together to create a spread that was free of artificial flavors, colors and preservatives while at the same time maintaining the extended quality our consumers have grown to expect," said Phil.

Next on the horizon from Pine River is adding to their gourmet cold packs by using rBST free ingredients which will help the marketability of its clean product line.

Semantics Of 'Cold Pack' Versus 'Cold Pack Cheese Food'

About 95 percent of the cheese used in Pine River cheese spreads comes from Wisconsin.

Being based in Wisconsin, Pine River recognizes the great cheese produced in the state and the importance of buying local.

"It's a tough product to make, especially if you care about quality as much as I do," Phil said. "I only use cheese that tastes good at the start. We don't have to mask bad or off flavors because of the high quality of our ingredients."

"Consumers would be surprised at how much the age and flavor of the cheese and blending techniques can impact the final product," Phil said. "Most people think you just take a little Cheddar,

throw in something else, cut it up and make it spreadable."

"There's so many other considerations like time, temperature, age of the cheese, that impacts the texture at the end," he said. "Purchasing premium 40-pound blocks of Grade A Cheddar and aging to our specifications is crucial in crafting our award winning products."

We are proud to call our products "cold pack cheese food," Mary said. If you look in your local grocer, you'd see similar products called all different things – spreadable cheese, cheese spread, spreadable Cheddar – but if you see 'cold pack cheese food,' you know it's the highest level of quality with the most cheese in it."

The federal government's standard of identity for cold pack cheese food requires that a product contain 51 percent or more cheese as an ingredient with a moisture level of less than 44 percent.

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—Philip Lindemann, Jr.,
Pine River Pre-Pack

By removing "cold pack cheese food" from labels, companies can increase the moisture level and substitute oils and powders for cheese, Phil said.

Those are actions that can improve your bottom line, but will be evident in the quality of the finished spread.

Private label also makes up a growing segment for Pine River as grocers and cheese makers look to diversify their product line and associate their name with a quality product.

Whether it is using Pine River's existing recipes, creating a unique custom formula, or using a cheese makers own cheese to create their own blend, Pine River welcomes each partnership.

At the 2017 US Championship Cheese Contest, Pine River's Chunky Bleu and Smoky Bacon took second and third respectively in the Cold Pack Cheese Food Category.

While the Pine River brand

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Phil and Mary Lindemann of Pine River Pre-Pack display the top three winners in the US Championship Cheese Contest's cold pack cheese food category. All three of the cheese entries were made at the Pine River Pre-Pack plant in Newton, WI

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did not take first, Widmer's Brick Cheese Spread, a private label custom blend produced by Pine River took home the gold.

Widmer's Cheese Cellar, Teresa WI, saw a market for their washed rind brick cheese blended into a unique spread and partnered with Pine River to create this award winning item.

"We are always interested in working with cheese makers, wineries, brewers to create specialty blends, says Phil. "We can work with natural cuts, whether it be a Gouda, Brick, goat cheese, Asiago, Pepper Jack or Feta. They make delicious spreads and expand and enhance the cheese maker's line."

"Anything we make is as good as our own. We don't cut corners on any private label products," he continued.

"Most private label companies have such great brand recognition, it's a no-brainer to add spreads to their product catalogues or space on the grocery shelf," Mary added.

In 2011, Pine River built a new manufacturing facility that doubled its production capacity with two state-of-the-art cutters that assure standout flavor and texture. In 2016, its cheese manufacturing became SQF (Safe Quality Food) Level 3.

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In addition to being SQF Level 3, the company's ongoing initiative is the implementation of the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA).

"We are already compliant with FSMA, and are continuing to work with our suppliers and distribution outlets." Phil said. "We're talking about every level of our business from procured ingredients, the storage facilities, the trucking companies and the stores that sell our spreads— everyone's going to have to understand and implement the regulations and work together to keep our country's food safe."

Pine River crafts 16 different flavors that are sold nationwide through foodservice, retail distribution.

For more information, visit the company website at www.pineriver.com.

Parmalat Mature Gouda Is South Africa Dairy Product Of The Year At Agri-Expo

Sandringham, South Africa—Parmalat's 10-month Mature Gouda made for Woolworths won South African Dairy Product of the Year here recently at the Agri-Expo Quality Awards.

This contest drew 854 entries from 83 producers, including 13 newcomers to the competition. A judging panel of 74 industry experts – from food technologists to cheese retailers and chefs – selected 16 entries with the Quality Mark of Excellence. They include:

Parmalat SA: Simonsberg Matured Gouda, Woolworths Matured Gouda 10 Months,

Matured Cheddar, Woolworths Vintage Cheddar

Klein River Cheese: Klein River Gruberg Extra Mature

Lancewood Holdings: PnP Low Fat Chunky Cottage Cheese-Sweet Piquant Pepper & Garlic, Medium Fat Plain Cream Cheese, PnP Medium Fat Cream Cheese-Balsamic & Onion Medium Fat Cream Cheese

De Pekelaar Kaas: Boerenkaas with Cumin

Fairview Cheese Company: Woolworths De Leeuwen

Delitaly Pty Ltd: Don Gelato Piemonte Hazelnuts

Fair Cape Dairies: Woolworths Full Cream Raspberry Yoghurt

Foxenburg Estate: Renosterbos Matured, 4 months

Clover: 1906 Extra Mature Cheddar, 0-18 months

Belnori Boutique Cheesery: Kilembe

Dalewood Fromage: Dalewood-Lanquedoc

"The process of determining the Dairy Product of the Year from such classes as ice cream and butter, or Cottage cheese and sheep's milk cheese, is no easy feat," said chief judge Kobus Mulder.

This year, we instituted a new procedure where all Quality winners are lined up and evaluated to determine the most superior dairy product, Mulder said. In previous years, the product with the highest overall score was awarded this honor.

"We are only too aware that not all milk is created equal, and we were pleasantly surprised by the quality of entries we received," said Agri-Expo CEO Johan Ehlers.



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