

Kosherfest 2017

KOSHER INNOVATION AND PROGRESS



Naomi Ross

Kosher certainly looks a lot different than it did twenty-nine years ago, when the first Kosherfest food industry trade show took place. Once the only arena to connect kosher companies with distributors and industry professionals, this year's Kosherfest featured more than four hundred booths and an estimated six thousand visitors in attendance at the Meadowlands Exposition Center in Secaucus, New Jersey. Event founder Menachem Lubinsky of Lubicom gushed at the now-\$12.5-billion industry and marveled at how kosher has grown.

"Kosher has captured the world!" he said, reflecting with pride that ninety-nine countries have kosher-certified products, with the United States alone producing 25,000 of these.

Despite the size of this year's event, Lubinsky attributed the exponential growth to the surge in digital growth: a confluence of online shopping with the information and recipes circulated via kosher websites and bloggers. He encouraged business to take advantage of the tremendously valuable marketing research and analysis that has become increasingly available. Understanding and using this data to spot trends will continue to drive the kosher industry and trends as they peak and thrive.

What does all that mean to the new kosher product on the street? For the newly certified kosher company or the brand-new product line, it means a much faster road to your shelf — and instant (or nearly instant!) visibility.

Each year as I stroll through the aisles of the show, I look for products that stand out. High-quality foods, innovative flavors, creative design — anything that pushes the standards of kosher eating just a little bit higher. While large kosher companies do still have a presence at the show — albeit not compared to prior years — many times it is small, niche companies that zero in on a specialty idea or void in the market. When that happens, great products can emerge from this global marketplace... and this year is no exception.

INNOVATION



A few years back, there was a period of time when no kosher Parmesan cheese was available. I am not talking about the chalky stuff shaken out of a jar. I am talking about the real-deal, hard aged wedge that must be grated, the salty sharpness of which can do wonders even in small amounts when finishing your food. No aged Parmesan-like cheese was to be found, and certainly no authentic Italian Parmigiano Reggiano, upon which all domestic copycats are based. Complicated factors involved in kosher production were getting in the way.

Eventually, many cheese manufacturers overcame these obstacles, once again delivering aged Parmesan to consumers. However, one Italian company recognized the lack of true Parmigiano Reggiano, and set about creating the only real certified Parmigiano Reggiano in the world — true to both kosher and Italian standards. Bertinelli came out with their Parmigiano Reggiano in 2015 by owning and operating their own dairy to manage and produce *chalav Yisrael* cheese within the mandated geography and in accordance with the mandates for cheese-making to be considered real "Parmigiano Reggiano."

In addition to their classic wedges, Bertinelli came to Kosherfest with new-to-market varieties — high-quality grated, flaked, and cubed cheese for convenience. Small metal cans and canisters specially made for long-term storage and moisture extend the life of your cheese.

If you've ever bought pretzel challah — the newish, hugely popular bread that looks like a bread-y challah but tastes like a chewy soft pretzel — chances are that you've had Yoni's Pretzel Challah. Based out of New Jersey, the 1½-year-old company has found itself a real niche market. Supplying over 70 supermarkets with retail loaves is only part of their business. On the commercial end, Yoni's supplies commercial bakeries and caterers as well with rolls, challah, and super-sized simchah challahs to order. The company is trying to keep up with their quick growth and will be branching out to Chicago, Atlanta, and Denver in the near future.



Foie gras has been a controversial food for a long time, and it will continue to be as long as it is being produced. Until now, kosher foie gras (pronounced *fwah-grah*), French for "fatty liver," has never been available in the United States. Known for its supremely rich and luxuriously creamy texture, foie gras is produced by force-feeding geese or ducks to the point that their livers become fattened. Whether this practice constitutes *tzaar baalei chaim* (unethical treatment of animals) is beyond the scope of this article. All arguments aside, foie gras is indisputably decadently delicious. Heritage Kosher Foie Gras, located in the Catskills, is now the country's sole purveyor of kosher duck foie gras (in addition to duck fat and magret duck breasts) for restaurant service with an eye toward retail in the future. This new development is sure to be a boon for high-end kosher restaurants.



GIFTABLE

When a product is not only high in quality, but also has a good giftable factor, that is a good sign for its growth. “Gifttable” means, “Yes, I like its taste enough,” or “Yes, it is cute enough,” or “Yes, it is nice enough that I would actually spend money and give it to someone else!” “Gifttable” also means the packaging is clever or attractive enough that it makes a nice gift.

Several gifttable items made their debut at Kosherfest worth mentioning, especially for the consumer in the digital age.

Sholom Tea is a brand-new line of Jewish-themed teas that are artisanal blends of organic teas, fruits, herbs, flowers and roots. Produced by a larger Washington state tea manufacturer (and under the Vaad of Greater Seattle), each unique blend of loose tea comes in a decorative tin. Who wouldn't want to try a cup of Burning Bush tea (the flaming color of lily flowers inspired the name) or “Heavenly Mannah Tea,” a blend of coconut, dragon fruit, honey and black tea? Cute and kitschy enough to make a great gift.



was so good that she began making it for her kids' friends and giving it out for *mishloach manos* on Purim. That was the beginning of Granola Chik, probably the most wholesome and fresh-tasting granola I've ever had. Subtly addictive, with a clean, fresh taste, the granola is still made by hand, and flavors include Original, Vanilla Coconut, Peanut Butter, Cinnamon Raisin, and seasonal flavors like Autumn Crunch. I'd be happy to gift this to someone who appreciates high-quality foods... or I could just eat it all myself.



Paula Shoyer, celebrated cookbook author and pastry chef, has used her talents to create a fun gift item right in time for Chanukah. The Kosher Baker Make Your Own Donut Holes Kit is a sleek box with everything an aspiring home baker would need to create beautiful cake donut holes. All necessary equipment, decorating sugars, glaze mix, and pre-measured mixes come in one easily wrap-able package.

When Aimee Turner's husband was diagnosed with colon cancer ten years ago, she began to make big changes in the way she cooked and what she brought into their home. “I cleaned the house of dairy, meat, and sugar,” explained Turner. Looking to replace the sweet treats she used to bake for her kids and family with better alternatives, she started making her own granola from natural and healthy ingredients. It



RAISING THE BAR ON QUALITY

As kosher consumers become more discerning about quality and taste, there are many companies that answer this call, continually providing consumers with better quality and healthier buying options. The following companies are not new, but are working hard to bring new products to consumers who really care.

I've mentioned Pelleh Poultry, purveyors of retail duck products, in past reviews. The family-owned farm made the leap to retail products a few years ago, with great success. This year, Pelleh Poultry was proud to display their newest products: frozen packaged duck breasts and frozen packaged duck legs. Why is this a big deal, the reader may ask? Previously, kosher companies selling duck would only sell the whole duck (and nothing but the

duck...). As home cooks have gotten more sophisticated, following recipes that call for one select part of the bird, having to buy the whole duck became somewhat inconvenient. Pelleh Poultry filled a seemingly simple demand... and now it's in your freezer section.



The Honey Smoked Fish Co. has been

operating out of Aurora, Colorado, for over twenty years. Opening up a vacuum-sealed side of his hot-smoked salmon, owner Kevin Mason began giving out samples of a super-moist salmon that seemed like it had just been cooked. The packaging makes it look like it should be lox, but this is an entirely different type of smoking process and does not leave the fish with a cured, firm texture. The hot-smoking process infuses honey into the salmon through a special firing system, sealing in the natural juices with a sweet, slightly smoky hickory flavor. Mason came to Kosherfest looking to bring his fish to the East Coast; be on the look-out for his five varieties (Original, Chipotle & Lime, Cajun, Cracked Peppers, and Lemon Pepper.)



Do you remember the Joray Fruit Rolls from every Pesach of your youth? Of course you do (who could forget peeling the fruit leather off the cellophane?), because they have been around for over fifty years, making the same apricot-based fruit rolls. The four-generation family business just got a fresh makeover. Fruit IQ (from the makers of Joray) is a new all-natural, non-GMO, healthy fruit roll produced without refined sugar, corn syrup or colorings. Apricot, Sour Plum, Tart Cherry, and Cranberry flavors are still rolled on the iconic cellophane, but taste better than ever.



KosherCo by Estee Kafra developed from

her sincere desire to source pure, high-quality products for the kosher industry. Her chocolate chips (made from Callebaut chocolate), baking mixes, and healthy cookies have achieved this in the baking realm. Look out for savory cooking sauces that taste like your grandmother's brisket pan sauce, and fruity wine sauce with sweet bits of onions. She just saved you all the work with the same homemade taste — but no artificial ingredients.



If you've ever purchased an instant soup or consommé powder — a modern convenience that many have come to rely on — then you've likely gone through the mental negotiations involved in justifying your purchase of a product whose sodium content could rival that of the Dead Sea. Having worked in the kosher supermarket industry for many years, Mark Menasche was all too familiar with this common consumer dilemma, and set out with his wife to develop a healthier alternative. They created Spicify, an all-natural consommé powder that has no added salt, no MSG, no fat, no sugar, and no preservatives. What it does have is a great natural flavor base derived from yeast, dehydrated vegetables, and a mix of spices. Spicify puts the sodium content of food back in the hands of us cooks who can — and should — salt to taste. Less than two months old, Spicify is already on the shelves of neighborhood stores, so keep an eye out!



The kosher world keeps on expanding. Exponentially.

What was once a tiny shelved section of matzah ball mixes and jarred gefilte fish in your average supermarket is no longer confined to supermarkets or sections at all, nor are the choices so provincial. With so many mainstream products under supervision, the list of available choices gets longer each year, and if you don't find it in a store, it is not uncommon to source and order elsewhere. That kind of competition is what spurs innovation, creating new opportunities for young entrepreneurs, causing established companies to reinvent themselves, and delivering great food experiences for us all.