

# Convenient, lean and 'green'

Packaging that's "greener" and more convenient is center-of-plate for today's savvy meat processors and busier-than-ever consumers. *By Rick Lingle*

**I**n the complex landscape of meat packaging trends, two drivers that have long-term "legs" stand out as much in this segment as they do most packaged product categories: sustainability and convenience.

In the past, it was not good for packaged meat to be "green," but in this sustain-

ability-driven era, green is in when it comes to packaging.

One of the key findings from the 2012

*Power of Meat Report* released this summer was that 28% of shoppers said they would purchase more meat and poultry if packaged using environmentally friendly materials, even if it costs a little more.

However, 49% said they would only purchase more if there was no price difference. Fielded by 210 Analytics ([www.210analytics.com](http://www.210analytics.com)), the study was commissioned jointly by the American Meat Institute (AMI) and the Food Marketing Institute (FMI) with sponsorship by Sealed Air's Cryovac Food Packaging Division.

On the other side of the coin, products

## Packaging

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Coles in Australia has been using corn-based trays for prepacked beef, veal, lamb and sausage products since late 2011. The supermarket chain projects using 95 million of the trays in 2012.

perceived as overpackaged can have a negative effect on consumers — and on packagers' profit margins if they are using more materials than needed. It's little wonder that meat packagers such as Hormel Foods have focused a great deal of attention on increasing recycling efforts, reducing solid waste and achieving dramatic source-reduction goals. These components are typically quantified key performance indicators within the environmental portion of a company's Consumer Social Responsibility program.

Hormel released mid-summer its second set of environmental goals. The company exceeded its packaging-reduction goal of 4 million pounds annually from 2006 to 2011 by reaching 4.4 million pounds per year and a total of 21.8 million pounds. It has set the bar higher, with a new goal to reduce product packaging by 25 million pounds by 2020.

Although corrugated reductions have been a major focus of such programs, even flexible-packaging improvements are targeted. For example, the John Morrell Food Group processing plant in Sioux Falls, S.D., invested in a bagging system that "right-sizes" packaging to the specific product, significantly reducing the amount of

material required.

This eliminated plastic waste to landfills and resulted in annual savings of \$370,000.

Mark Russell, director of business management, West Liberty Foods, identifies two fundamental reasons for source-reduction to continue: "It has a dual benefit of reducing the overall environmental impact of the packaging and reducing cost, thus making the product more affordable for the consumer."

Russell believes that alternative materials will play a larger role going forward.

"Options for packaging from renewable (plant-based) resources continue to improve, which will begin to replace oil-based plastics," he adds.

Underscoring the fact that sustainability is a global phenomenon, Australian supermarket chain Coles has been rolling out protein products packaged in high-barrier, corn starch-based trays for pre-packed beef, veal, lamb and sausage products since late 2011. The trays use up to 80% certified-renewable material and are designed to improve the carbon footprint of fresh-food packaging. Coles is the first Australian supermarket to adopt the technology.

## PMMI reports on sustainability

When we asked Jorge Izquierdo, vice president, market development for the Packaging Machinery Manufacturers Institute (PMMI), to comment on sustainability, he referenced a report the PMMI released this spring: *Journey to Sustainability Excellence*, created by the Sustainability Solutions Group of the Alliance for Innovation & Operational Excellence (AIOE). The report covers sustainability across three aspects: The Triple Bottom Line, Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Indicators. It identifies the 18 attributes of a sustainability program in parallel for three life-cycle stages: beginner, intermediate and advanced. Some highlights:

Sustainability programs need management support and a point person devoted to sustainability.

"When the CEO is committed to the program and defines a clear plan, it makes things much easier, and the probability for success increases significantly," comments Izquierdo.

Measuring sustainability is one of the keys for success. "Companies know now what to measure, and are getting more sophisticated in measuring and auditing their sustainability programs," says Izquierdo. "Managers have a better understanding on why they are doing this."

Finally, it's also about education of the above to company employees, suppliers, customers and consumers, Izquierdo points out. For more information, visit [PMMI.org](http://PMMI.org).