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VACUUM PACKAGING FRESH MEATS--PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

by
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Vacuum packaging of fresh meats has received favorable reaction by consumers and retailers as indicated in recent test results.

Who is doing this? Associated Grocers of Colorado, with the co-operation of the Allied Meat Company and the American Can Company.

The Allied Meat Company is packing this meat to AG's specification under our supervision. We then ship the product from our warehouse on refrigerated trucks.

American Can Company is assisting with the proper material and type of equipment, also helping with bacteria control and proper lighting at the retail level.

Associated Grocers of Colorado is a 38 year old co-operative with general offices located in Denver, Colorado. Branches are also located in Pueblo, Colorado and Albuquerque, New Mexico. Sales for the last year were in excess of \$200,000,000 to over 900 member stores located in a six-state area.

Why is this new process being tested?

A. Associated Grocers of Colorado felt a need to help the independent retailer give their customers, Mrs. Consumer, a quality fresh meat product as good or better than the chain store and still be competitive.

B. Also, due to the shortage of meat cutters today, many of our stores do not have the services available for the consumer.

C. Many stores such as convenience operations, Trading Posts, Ma & Pa stores will be able to offer a variety of fresh meats and make a profit.

D. Meat is ranked at the top of the list of all perishable items sold at the retail level.

E. The quality and tenderness of fresh meats is increased.

F. Longer storage and display life without freezing, making it more convenient for the retailer and the consumer.

G. Merchandising methods can be improved instead of being concerned about processing areas.

H. Better inventory control.

I. Bacterial growth is cut down.

J. Because of coming Federal and State sanitation and inspection regulations at the retail level.

As a result of these reasons, customer satisfaction and sales will be increased!

What are we doing?

A. For the last few years, AG of Colorado has offered an excellent meat program for our retailers. A beef selection program is an important part of our programs.

1. We select regular carcass beef and primals.

2. We select all bloc-redi Multivac beef carcass and primals called "Taste Treat in Finer Eating".

3. We now will offer complete merchandise line of fresh beef, pork and lamb, retail vacuum packaged meats.

B. Now AG has developed an ultra-new idea in meat packaging that entraps and retains the flavor and tenderness of fresh cut meat...the "Flavor saver" package...This not only keeps the meat super-fresh, but also reduces shrinkage and loss of juices. It can be kept unopened in a refrigerator as long as one normally keeps fresh meats...and the tenderness, flavor and juiciness will actually improve!

Sure you can freeze it. Just put the entire package into your freezer. No need to re-wrap. The contents are fully protected. No freezer burn, either. Want a TASTE TREAT? Then try our Taste Treat "Flavorsaver" packaged meats...It's the ultimate in eating pleasure!

This vacuum packaging concept is being tested in two AG stores and more stores to be added soon. As other new stores are added they will be expected to follow our quality control program to the letter.

The Method: Over 40 retail cuts of beef and pork merchandising varieties are presently being processed in the vacuum package. This package is then put on a white foam tray to give the

package uniformity in the display and to prevent leakers. It is then labeled and priced at the competitive retail prices for the area. Each of these cuts are assembled back together by the original cut it came from. For example:

(14 Items)

1. Retail side of beef (4 boxes)
2. Retail beef hindquarter (2 boxes)
3. Retail beef forequarter (2 boxes)
4. Retail beef round (1 box)
5. Retail beef chuck (1 box)
6. Retail beef rib/short ribs (1 box)
7. Retail beef loin/flank (1 box)
8. 1# 70% regular ground beef (1 50# box)
9. 1# 80% lean ground beef (1 50# box)
10. 1# 90% extra lean ground beef (1 50# box)
11. Retail pork loins (5PC 14/17# 2 boxes)
12. Retail pork butts (8PC 4/8# 2 boxes)
13. Retail pork spareribs (3/dn# 1 box)
14. Retail pork spareribs (3/5# 1 box)

All of these items are dated with a pull date on each package. Fresh cuts of lamb will be available soon.

Tests have shown that this meat should be 40° or less before being processed. Also a 30°-35° range should be held at the warehouse level, on delivery to the store and in display cases.

The constant temperature control prevents purge in the package and gives longer life. We have actually tested under ideal conditions the holding qualities of this meat for as long as 6 weeks. After opening the package, the color blooms to a natural meat color...which is beautiful! The eating qualities are excellent.

We have a quality control program set up for the store to follow so this will be successful for them and their customers.

Have we had problems? (Yes, some) Ag of Colorado has been on this test program for the past 13 weeks. The main problems have been rotation control at the retail level. We have found that frozen boneless beef should be avoided from making the ground beef items. The color of ground beef is better and lasts longer if fresh boneless beef is used.

Retaining constant color on some beef cuts has been a problem. Sanitation control is very important at the processing plant. American Can Company has been of great help to us on bacteria control. Bacteriologists will be assisting us soon. Our percentage of leakers has been less than 3% the past four weeks.

Where do we go from here?

At the two existing stores we have worked to educate the retailer and the consumer to this new "Taste Treat" idea. The consumer reaction has been excellent! Mrs. Consumer is still interested in buying fresh meat vs. frozen. We will be setting up more stores in the same manner on an individual basis soon.

Our supplier is building a new plant which will include a retail operation. After the first of the year we will be able to get into production on a larger scale unless unseen reasons show differently.

Guidelines for the success of this new program: Improved packaging methods, increased production, bacteria control, temperature control at the supplier level.

For the Retailer: Proper equipment, lighting, rotation, temperature control, inventory control, store promotions and consumer education will aid in the success of the new Taste Treat concept in these days of CHANGING TIMES.