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**Buona Foods championing its Mushroom Gourmet Crumble at retail**

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By

Keith Loria

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[Buona Foods](#) is a third-generation, family-owned mushroom company, which operates three farms and a packinghouse in the mushroom capital of the world, Kennett Square, PA.

“Since 1975 we have been packing and shipping a full line of retail and foodservice mushrooms,” said Chris Johansen, sales and account manager for the Landenberg, PA-based company. “Growing a consistent high-quality mushroom is obviously at the core of a farm’s success. After that, it’s about relationships and close contact with our customers. We build long-term partnerships, working hand-in-hand with buyers and category managers to identify trends, stay competitive and share our knowledge of all things mushroom.”

Over the past two years, the mushroom industry has been fortunate to thrive and reach a lot of consumers that were not mushroom users or were infrequent buyers.

“As people began to cook more at home, they turned to mushrooms for variety in their meals and the tremendous health benefits that they provide,” Johansen said. “Consumers’ interest in reducing their meat consumption, by either substituting mushrooms for proteins or blending them together, has been a major trend that impacted our category. People moving altogether to vegetarian and vegan diets have also embraced mushrooms more, finding innovative ways to prepare them.”

For instance, he shared that King Oyster mushrooms can be cut into discs and sautéed to make vegan scallops. Pom Pom mushrooms can be pulled apart in a manner similar to crab meat to make vegetarian crabcakes.

Johansen noted retailers should utilize smart data mining and merchandising to improve rings at the register for mushrooms.

“Take the time to drill down on trending varieties and pack sizes,” he said. “Maximize the visibility of the exotics and value-added packages — these are the fastest growing segments in the mushroom category. Packaged mushrooms are a dream to set on a shelf as they offer a clean presentation and a substantial pack-out. Be sure to have signage up on everything, though, if you want your customers to try varieties they are not familiar with.”

In that regard, he suggests giving every variety a chance.

“While the lion’s share of mushroom sales still go to your whites, baby bellas, and portabellas, more people are cooking with shiitakes, oysters, and maitakes than ever before,” Johansen said. “The trend is to blend, and Buona Foods’ 100 percent Mushroom Gourmet Crumble is the next great thing in mushrooms at retail.”

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Buona Foods' mushrooms are harvested 364 days a year, although some days are better than others.

“Summer weather does impact our inputs — compost, peat moss, climate control — so we see the same growing challenges each year,” Johansen said. “We always strive to bring our A-game in the fourth quarter when sales swell.”

This year, a gradual increase in the production capabilities will allow Buona Farms to pack and ship more mushrooms in Q3 and Q4, always the busiest times of year.

“A shift to larger pack sizes is also a key development in selling more mushrooms at retail, and we have seen a steady increase in sales of 16-ounce packages” Johansen said. “We would like to believe that mushrooms are a staple in kitchens, both at home and in foodservice, but our products are seen by many as a premium ingredient. When the economy stumbles and people are watching their budgets, mushrooms can fall of the menu. That said, there is value to mushrooms comparable to higher-priced proteins.”

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## About Keith Loria |

A graduate of the University of Miami, Keith Loria is a D.C.-based award-winning journalist who has been writing for major publications for close to 20 years on topics as diverse as real estate, food and sports. He started his career with the Associated Press and has held high editorial positions at magazines aimed at healthcare, sports and technology. When not busy writing, he can be found enjoying time with his wife, Patricia, and two daughters, Jordan and Cassidy.

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