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The Mushroom Council plans year-round promotions

By

Keith Loria

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The [Mushroom Council](#) plays an important role in the national promotion of fresh mushrooms. Membership is comprised of fresh market producers or importers that average more than 500,000 pounds of mushrooms produced or imported annually.

The mushroom program is authorized by the Mushroom Promotion, Research and Consumer Information Act of 1990 and is administered by the Mushroom Council under the supervision of the Agricultural Marketing Service. Research and promotion programs help to expand, maintain and develop markets for individual agricultural commodities in the United States and abroad. These industry programs are requested and funded by the industry groups that they serve.

Bart Minor, president and CEO of the Mushroom Council, noted that while the Feed Your Immune System initiative continues to draw demand for fresh mushrooms, the Mushroom Council has been focused on two other major consumer-focused promotional initiatives — one that is just concluding and another one that is just beginning.

In the summer, it partnered with the Food Network to promote blended burgers at home and foodservice. “The Council once again leveraged spring/summer burger season as an opportunity to educate home and professional cooks on the benefits of blending fresh mushrooms with ground meat to make meals more delicious, nutritious and sustainable,” Minor said. “For the second year, the Mushroom Council partnered with Food Network Magazine and FoodNetwork.com for a summer’s worth of promotional activities.”

Kicking off in May and continuing through September, the multimedia program is one of the largest partnerships the Mushroom Council has ever embarked upon. Last year’s inaugural collaboration earned more than 90 million impressions and received more than 1,300 blended burger recipe entries in its annual contest.

“This collaboration is a strategic evolution for the Mushroom Council and its Blended Burger Project, which began more than 10 years ago by first reaching influential professional chefs with the Culinary Institute of America and the James Beard Foundation,” Minor said. “Today, the effort engages home cooks, showing them how to incorporate mushrooms into their favorite everyday meals.”

Leading up to and during September, which is National Mushroom Month, the Mushroom Council will be demonstrating how mushrooms are the answer in the face of rising food costs as part of its Mushroom are the Answer initiative.

“Our intent is to showcase how mushrooms can help consumers continue to enjoy the meaty meals they crave in these inflationary times,” Minor said. “Mushrooms are the great meal extender, whether it’s blending with meat for making even more burgers, bulking up a breakfast omelet or hearty soup

or maximizing a comforting dish like beef stroganoff.”

The council will be promoting this idea via collaborations with social influencers, media outreach, digital ads and a website hub launching mid-August.

“As we note on the site, during these times when maximizing your dollars is key, mushrooms can truly be your grocery budget’s best friend,” Minor said.

Anne-Marie Roerink, principal at 210 Analytics, noted that in a market where supply chain challenges are leaving holes on shelves throughout the store, the produce department and mushroom displays stand out as great examples of retailers and growers working together to keep supply flowing.

“Having visited some 30-plus retail banners in the last few months, I’ve been impressed with the availability and assortment of mushrooms,” she said. “In addition to the traditional 8- and 16-ounce white button mushrooms, most stores carry crimini, portabella and oftentimes oyster, shiitake or the mixed assortments. In walking the aisles, mushrooms are also popping up in areas around the store. This includes mushroom supplements added to baked goods, coffee or chocolate as well as fresh mushrooms being merchandised in the meat department.”

Many retailers have added plant-based meat alternatives to the self-serve meat area, but after initial success, unit sales have been in decline since the second quarter of 2021.

“Many retailers are pulling back on assortment or moving it to the freezer case, opening up some space for experimentation,” Roerink said. “Much like the plant-based meat alternatives, stuffed portabellas can be an animal protein replacement, and mushrooms are a frequent addition to burgers, steaks and roasts. In other words, it’s about the need state. As such, a secondary display of stuffed mushrooms in the meat case or even deli prepared area makes great sense.”

The biggest opportunity in mushrooms lies within a key strength of mushrooms themselves — versatility.

“Mushrooms can be a side, an ingredient or a center of plate item,” Roerink said. “They can be used in salads, soups, on pizza or blended with meat. They can be used for breakfast omelets, a lunch salad and dinner burger. But it’s all about routine and habit. We see this across categories: Heavy buyers always use items in more occasions and applications. Mushrooms are uniquely positioned to take advantage of that formula for success.”

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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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