



- Advertisement -

Caputo and Guest is spreading the word on exotic mushrooms

By

Keith Loria

August 4, 2023

For many years, Louis Caputo has joked that [Caputo and Guest](#) has been the “little brother” of the mushroom industry. Because when big retail companies ordered mushrooms, the mostly ordered common varieties from large suppliers.

“And they’d have this little portion of the order that was specialty mushrooms,” said Caputo, chief operating officer for Caputo and Guest, headquartered in Kennett Square, PA. “The big mushroom growers would just call us and buy their specialty mushrooms from us. And that really created a barrier for us.”

But things are starting to change, and more and more consumers are seeking the exotic or specialty, mushrooms that Caputo and Guest sells, as opposed to the common button white and brown mushrooms.

“The market research we’ve done shows people want them, they just don’t know where to buy them,” he said. “And they haven’t really been carried by grocery stores in the past.”

Caputo said that going back 20 - 30 years, when his family’s company began growing these exotic mushrooms, sales were very slow.

“It was a very, very niche market for these mushrooms,” he said. “But as the years have progressed and Americans have transitioned toward healthier eating and have, in general, become more health-conscious, mushrooms, especially the mushrooms we grow, have definitely been gaining market share.”

He compares the growing demand for specialty mushrooms to the salad industry, which for years, was dominated by iceberg and which are now overshadowed by foods like watercress, arugula, spinach and kale.

Caputo and the team at Caputo and Guest believe the same thing can happen with mushrooms, so the company is devoted to promoting those specialty varieties, making them available to consumers, and educating consumers on how to use them. That includes creating packs featuring pictures of dishes, such as mushroom tacos, mushroom pizza or mushroom stir-fry, along with a code that directs people to a recipe for the dish. That helps break the barrier between shoppers and mushroom varieties that look different from the most common types.

“Nobody wants to buy something they don’t know what to do with, and if we reach them with the recipe in front of them, they might be more willing to try it,” Caputo said. “And for the people who already know-how to use these mushrooms, we’re making these recipes available.”

Caputo and Guest also takes pride in being one of the only suppliers of truly American-grown mushrooms, and it grows its mushrooms on sterilized grains and oak to mimic the conditions in which mushrooms grow naturally.

Retailers who are looking to boost sales of exotic mushrooms have lots of opportunities, including the fact that they are a staple of vegan diets as a meat/protein replacement. Caputo says the Lion's Mane mushroom is growing in popularity, not only because of its flavor but because of its health benefits.

"There are some early studies showing it can be positive toward fighting or slowing dementia and Alzheimer's," he said. "It's a very versatile mushroom, it has a little bit of the consistency of crabmeat, so we're promoting it as a crabmeat substitute. There's no processing needed—you don't have to create a fake meat with it, the mushroom itself tastes a little bit sweet, but it peels and has the texture of a crabmeat."

Caputo and Guest deals with about a quarter-million pounds of exotic mushrooms weekly, and it's expecting to build on that with its recently completed expansion that will allow the company to increase production by about 400 percent.

"Now we have to fill that production with sales before we go ahead and mass produce more," Caputo said.

And with a knowledgeable and experienced team that is passionate about exotic mushrooms, Caputo and Guest are certain to do just that.

[Keith Loria](#)

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.

[Print](#)