

C-STORE

C-Stores Invest in Higher Quality Countertop Equipment for Hot and Cold Food Offerings

Today, a battle is raging for the hearts and minds—not to mention consumer dollars—of shoppers looking for quality, prepared foods on the go.



Heated merchandisers with poor temperature controls that overcook or dry out foods quickly or messy “ice baths” meant to keep coffee creamer cold are simply no longer acceptable.

Convenience stores are investing in higher quality equipment with precise digital temperature controls that hold foods longer and minimize food waste. More advanced equipment can even drive down operational costs by reducing the amount of electricity required.

Heated merchandisers

Heated merchandisers are the workhorse of convenience countertop top equipment and must be versatile enough to hold and display the full range of hot foods ready to eat, preferably near the register to spur impulse buys. The most advanced even allow different food items to be held at varying temperatures on each shelf to maximize salability in minimal counter space.

According to Kevin McGrath of Creative Serving, a New Jersey-based manufacturer of retail countertop food service equipment, convenience stores are squandering their profits when they burn, overcook and throw out hot food due to poorly heated merchandiser design.

“Imagine you have a 200-store chain and are making sandwiches but need a full, hot display case to sell well,” says McGrath. “If you get typical 60- to 90-minute hold times, you are throwing out an awful lot of hot food due to spoilage.”

The problem is that traditional open-air, heated merchandisers tend to place food items directly on an aluminum hot plate where it is prone to burn or overcook. Better models can extend hold time up to four hours and keep food fresh by preventing direct contact with a hot plate.

To enable precise temperature control on the widest range of foods, more advanced heated merchandisers come with a digital controller for each shelf. In this way, items such as pizza slices and chicken sandwiches that have different ideal serving temperatures can be optimally held in the same unit.

Traditionally, heated merchandisers small enough to be placed near the register to encourage last second impulse buys have been underpowered, often using just static heat from a single heating element and a light bulb.

When it comes to showcasing cookies, small heated merchandisers can also deliver a competitive edge. While some fast food chains now offer cookies in display cases at the register, they are typically served at room temperature. A display case with a digital controller can be set to the ideal temperature so cookies can be served hot out of the oven.

Refrigerated countertop units

To accompany hot food and coffee purchases, refrigerated countertop units dispense a wide assortment of toppings, condiments and even creamers that allow patrons to customize to their individual tastes. The refrigerated units must not only keep the items at a safe temperature but also enable patrons to quickly add their preferred topping or flavoring and get out the door with minimal hassle or mess.

Toppings and condiments can quickly spoil, make a mess and even cross contaminate if not properly refrigerated, contained and dispensed.

Whether for hot dogs or hot or cold sandwiches, there are now refrigerated units that can better contain and dispense a full range of toppings such as salsa, guacamole, mayonnaise, sour cream, relish and even cheese, onions and tomatoes.

Refrigerated units with digital controllers can significantly improve the temperature consistency throughout the entire cold zone. This not only improves quality and food safety but also minimizes product waste.

Traditional refrigerated units with removable lids can be bothersome to use, requiring the food item to be put down on the counter in order to remove the lid of the condiment. Fortunately, some newer refrigerated unit designs now offer a convenient hinged lid that can be easily flipped up and down for easy access to cold garnishes, toppings and condiments.

When countertop space is an issue, refrigerated units can even be as narrow as 15 inches wide, while holding up to six different condiments in a pan. Wider units that eliminate front to back scooping of condiments can help to eliminate any potential cross contamination issues.

Customization of the units can involve different pan configurations, as well as making circular cut outs for pumps to dispense toppings such as ketchup and mustard.

Coffee creamer edge

Given that coffee service is one of the primary draws for convenience stores, some c-store operators are looking for any edge to improve to further compete with the big coffee chains. This includes offering a variety of fresh creamer flavors instead of serving packets of fresh creamer kept in

messy “ice baths.”

McGrath said the difficulty with ice-filled wells is it is nearly impossible to maintain a set temperature as the ice melts. Individual packets of creamer also make a mess and are a hassle to open, pour and throw away for the customer. More costly refrigerated mechanical dispensers filled with large bags of creamer usually limit customer options to two flavors due to the amount of counter space required.

Today, compact, refrigerated countertop units can hold up to eight quart-sized coffee creamers.

More sophisticated systems also incorporate an on/off switch to ease use and facilitate periodic defrosting for maintenance. In contrast, many models require an operator to go behind the cabinet and unplug it in order to defrost.

McGrath adds that the most convenient refrigerated units for customers also typically include a caddy on top that dispenses other necessary items, such as sugar, straws and hot cup wrappers needed for a cup of coffee.

For more information, log onto creativeserving.com or write to Creative Serving, 5 Stahuber Avenue, Union, NJ 07083.

Massachusetts Governor Signs Bill Raising Tobacco-Buying Age to 21

With the backing of the state’s House and Senate, Massachusetts Gov. Charlie Baker signed a bill raising the legal age to buy tobacco products statewide from 18 to 21 years old.

The bill also broadens existing prohibitions on public smoking to include e-cigarettes and prohibits the use of tobacco products on the grounds of any public or private primary, secondary or vocational school.

Additionally, the new law will prohibit the sale of tobacco products by any pharmacy, hospital or other entity that offers healthcare services or that employs any licensed healthcare providers.

According to the Massachusetts Food Association, the proposal prohibits any retail establishment that sells pharmaceutical goods and services and is subject to regulation by the board of registration in pharmacy, or any retail establishment that operates a healthcare institution or has a healthcare institution located on or within its premises, from selling tobacco products and vapor products. They may continue to sell FDA-approved tobacco cessation products.

“Raising the age to buy tobacco products in the Commonwealth is an important step to prevent addiction for young people and encourage healthy choices,” Gov. Baker said. “We appreciate the Legislature’s collaboration to pass this bill that will limit the purchasing of cigarettes and other harmful products for those under 21 to support long-term health for the next generation.”

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health will produce posters that must be posted “conspicuously” in such establishments until Jan. 1, 2022. The new law takes effect on Dec. 30, 2018.



Massachusetts Gov. Charlie Baker signs the bill raising the state’s tobacco-buying age to 21 with department heads and health officials gathered around.

With Gov. Baker’s signature, Massachusetts becomes the sixth state to raise the minimum age for purchasing cigarettes to 21. The others are California, Hawaii, New Jersey, Maine and Oregon.

In other major tobacco news, Attorneys General of New York, Idaho, Illinois, Maine, Massachusetts, New Mexico, Oregon, Pennsylvania and Rhode Island recently sent a joint letter to the FDA to ask the agency to ban flavored tobacco products saying the use of flavors and menthol in tobacco impedes them from reaching public health goals related to smoking.

“Based on the substantial evidence supporting the conclusion that flavors in tobacco products damage the public health and the scant evidence of any benefit derived from them, we urge the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to ban the use of flavors, including menthol in all tobacco products,” the letter reads.

The letter also cites that “flavors in tobacco products, including menthol” impeded the states from

attaining their public health goals because “flavors have an outsized attraction towards youth, have a disparate impact on minority populations and, when present in e-cigarettes, have only a speculative positive effect on the rate of adult cigarette use.”

The National Association of Convenience Stores (NACS) has filed comments on FDA proposals that would limit the nicotine level in cigarettes and flavorings in tobacco products.

Also, Massachusetts Attorney General Maura Healey’s office is investigating Juul Labs Inc. and other online e-cigarette retailers that sell Juul and Juul-compatible products over concerns about the marketing and sale of the electronic smoking devices and products to minors.

The purpose of the investigation is to determine if they are in violation of state laws and regulations, including the Massachusetts consumer protection statute and the state’s e-cigarette regulations, by failing to prevent minors from purchasing their products.

Shaw’s, Food Companies Extend Helping Hands to Displaced NECCO Workers

Food companies are among a large group of businesses that are stepping up to hire displaced New England Confectionery Co. (NECCO) workers after the company’s plant in Revere, Massachusetts, abruptly shut down operations on Tuesday, July 24.

The plant’s nearly 230 workers were told to report on Friday, July 27, for their last paycheck and to claim personal belongings. Round Hill Investments LLC decided to sell the brands to an unnamed, national confection manufacturer. Also, much of the plant equipment and many of the brands for sale in a public auction, Sept. 26-28. Union Confectionery Machinery has been tapped by a third party buyer to sell the NECCO assets. The auction will be held at the NECCO plant, 135 American Legion Highway in Revere. Inspection is available Monday and Tuesday, Sept. 24-25, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

The NECCO brands for sale include Mary Jane, Might Malt Milk Balls, Haviland Thin Mints, Clark and Sky Bar, Slap Stix, Peach Blossoms and Banana Splits. Not included are NECCO wafers, Sweethearts and Canada Mints.

The closing both surprised and disappointed City of Revere Mayor Brian Arrigo.

“We are disappointed that Round Hill could not follow through on the enthusiasm it expressed when it acquired NECCO barely two months ago,” said Arrigo. “We received no advance word about the situation from any representative of any of the involved parties and only learned about it after receiving media inquiry. Obviously, we would have preferred, at the very least, some fundamental notification.”

Several workers have filed a class-action lawsuit against Round Hill, alleging that it failed to warn employees ahead of time that they would be laid off. The federal Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification Act (WARN) requires employers to give at least 60 days’ notice for mass layoffs.

The city of Revere held a job fair for the displaced workers, and Arrigo has been in touch with government and business contacts to open communication between them and prospective employees.

“Already, six private companies in food service have expressed interest in interviewing displaced workers,” the mayor said. “Meanwhile, the Rapid Response team in Gov. Charlie Baker’s Workforce Development Board is setting up to help displaced workers, and we are coordinating with Speaker of the House Bob DeLeo for their help, and Greater Lynn Senior Services is seeking 50-60 drivers to serve their clients.

“Job termination is never good news, but the regional economy is strong and hopefully able to absorb these people who have a demonstrated work ethic and experience in the food production industry,” he said.

Arrigo added that Revere’s Ward Four Councilor Patrick Keefe, a culinary director with Legal Sea Foods, was the first to reach him.

“Councilor Keefe contacted us first thing this morning to open communication with Legal Sea Foods’ recruitment director,” said Arrigo in a July 25 press release. “We also have heard from Kelly’s Roast Beef, Winfrey’s Chocolates in Rowley, Shaw’s Super Markets and Five Way Foods, a producer of vegetable and bone broths that will be starting operation here in Revere later this year, and Easy Pie, a pizza restaurant in Revere and Braintree.”

Shaw’s is hiring at all locations with its greatest need at the Melrose location. Mayor Arrigo said that the city’s human resources department is ready to provide help to Revere residents affected by the closing, and there may be open positions in public employment.