

Secret Shopper: Mission Nashville

School Nutrition's undercover shopping team identified many intriguing new products at SNA's Annual National Conference.

For the second straight year at SNA's Annual National Conference (ANC), *School Nutrition* assembled a discerning group of "Secret Shoppers," who were charged with seeking out the most exciting items on display in the Exhibit Hall in Nashville. Each year, the magazine's shoppers are given a simple, straight-forward mission: Tell us what products caught your eye—and why.

By using an independent team of school nutrition operators to identify the creative innovations they find most intriguing, *School Nutrition* can ensure that we're highlighting products with genuine potential to excite all our readers. This year's Secret Shopper team represented districts of all sizes and demographics and hailed from all across the country, from Maine to Alaska!

And they discovered dozens of noteworthy products. From foods and beverages that meet new nutrition standards to equipment solutions to helpful resources of all stripes, these Secret Shopper finds are sure to grab your attention, too. The products and companies with multiple citations and/or passionate shopper comments are highlighted here. Take a look!

Shoppers Wanted!

School Nutrition's 2011 ANC Secret Shoppers all reported that this was a fun project and they enjoyed the opportunity to see the Exhibit Hall in a fresh, engaging way. Interested in being part of the team at ANC 2012 in Denver? We're recruiting! For more information or to volunteer, send an e-mail to snmagazine@schoolnutrition.org.



Something Different



Del Monte

www.delmonte.com/foodservice

The most popular of the 2011 Exhibit Hall finds among our Secret Shoppers was Squeezable Fruit™ from **Del Monte**. This "fruit in a tube" is made with 100% U.S. fruit, is only 50 calories and can be served at room temperature, chilled or frozen. It's "very easy for children to eat—and fun, too!" enthused

one shopper, while another imagined kids eating the frozen version like a "freeze pop." A third noted, "It's a neat way to get one fruit serving, and will work for sack meals."

Shoppers also thought it would work "great" for breakfast, vending and snacks, and, at a cost of 25 cents, the price point was "decent" for schools. Other cited benefits included the product's 18-month shelf-life, ease for storage and no utensils required for consumption.



Descon

www.desconinc.com

Another extremely popular item among SN shoppers was the EZ Tag from **Descon**. Available in two sizes (2.25x5-in. and 3x6-in.), this self-adhesive magnetic tag can be used with your custom inserts on serving lines and in kitchens. EZ Tag sticks to any solid surface area (from Plexiglas sneeze-guards to stainless serving lines). The company asserts that the tag is easy to remove, wipe and reapply without sticky residue.



Shoppers reported the product could be used to label items on the serving line, highlight nutrition information or post allergy warnings. One shopper called EZ Tag "a wonder—a neat, professional way to label your food products or post signage." Another credits the product with being "extremely neat, versatile, affordable and reusable." Enthusiasm was abundant: "A simple solution"; "Neat"; "Love this!"

Dick and Jane Baking Company

www.dickandjanebakingco.com

School nutrition professionals have long insisted that the cafeteria is a great place for education—but not just about nutrition! Shoppers loved the SMA+RT Cookies from **Dick and Jane Baking Company**. The "educational snacks" can help students learn their states, capitals and U.S. presidents, as well as Spanish/English vocabulary! These whole-grain treats are made from an all-natural recipe: no nuts, trans fats, cholesterol, high-fructose corn syrup, hydrogenated oils or artificial colors/flavors. Lesson plans and activity sheets also are available. The company is marketing them to elementary schools for lunch, breakfast (served with yogurt), snacks, field trips, summer food-service, special events, a la carte, vending and classroom parties.

Several SN shoppers said they liked the "whole-grain contribution," and were tickled by the "bilingual aspect." On top of that, they found it "a great-tasting cookie," and loved "the quality of the product," as well as "the overall idea of learning and eating." School nutrition operators know best that "kids l-o-v-e to have fun with their food!"



I'll Drink to That!



DI Manufacturing www.dimanufacturing.com

School nutrition operators are struggling with increased numbers of children who require gluten-free menu offerings, and **DI Manufacturing** has an option that several *SN* shoppers found intriguing. The company's Mr. Sips line of gluten-free entrées features kid-friendly options packaged for a week's menu cycle. Currently there are two cycles available, featuring such items as pizza, hot dogs, chicken wings, sandwiches and cookies. The most popular entrées are available in bulk cases.

"We have more than 50 celiac/gluten-free diets [to accommodate]," said one shopper, noting, "It is hard to find a tasty, economical product. This company offers great variety, [with products that are] simple and safe." Another lauded the line as a "simple way to plan for a student's gluten-free needs!" One shopper believed the product could be especially helpful for "small districts with just a few celiac kids." And another wrote, "What caught my attention was the innovation of this product. The pricing that they could quote was, I felt, very reasonable for a product with such variety."

MARS Foodservices www.marsfoodservices.com

A number of shoppers on *School Nutrition's* team were ready to lace up their sneakers after tasting the Marathon® Smart Stuff™ Bar Powered by Snickers® from **MARS Foodservices**. "Great packaging, great tasting, great product!" said one shopper, adding, "Children will run to these because of these [attributes]—and also because it says 'Snickers!'" The energy bars meet nutrition guidelines, offer 5 g of whole grains and are 140 calories (or less) per serving. They are available in four varieties: Crunchy Multi-Grain, Crunchy Chocolate Crisp, Crunchy Honey Graham and Crunchy Trail Mix. "It's a great healthy line for a la carte and vending," cited another shopper. "Great bar—delicious!" said a third.

Dean Foods www.deanfoods.com

Getting pushback when it comes to menuing flavored milks? *SN* secret shoppers recommend looking into TruMoo® from **Dean Foods**. The milks (available in chocolate and strawberry) are fat-free, have no high fructose corn syrup and, with just 22 g total sugar (10 g of added sugar), meet nutrition targets in the proposed meal pattern regulation. TruMoo flavored milk has less added sugar than flavored, enhanced water beverages, sports drinks, flavored bottle coffee, soda and fruit and energy drinks. One shopper noted the line has "very good flavor." Education-themed packaging is available.

The Juice 4U! line of fruit-vegetable juices from **Country Pure Foods** caught shoppers' eyes. These 100% juices feature no added sugars or preservatives, are fortified with calcium and come in six flavors. One shopper described the "unique and bold flavor" of the drinks, and several cited the attractive product packaging, sure to attract kids' attention. "Great graphic artwork will promote the product," asserted one shopper. "It's something different," complimented another.

Country Pure Foods www.juice4u.com



Super Snacks

Popcorn Indiana www.popcornindiana.com

"Knowing how good [the company's] popcorn is, I tried this new item and it is an awesome snack," praised one *SN* shopper of Chipins, a line of all-natural popcorn chips from **Popcorn Indiana**. "It looks like a tortilla chip, but it's a popcorn chip," she described of the whole-grain, gluten-free option. It's available in four flavor varieties: Sea Salt, Jalapeño Ranch, Hot Buffalo Wing and White Cheddar. Each single-serve 28 g bag has between 18-20 chips. "It's a whole-grain snack that's gluten-free—and tasty, too!" reported another shopper.



PepsiCo www.pepsico.com

The "great sweet-but-not-so-sweet taste" of new Sun™ brand Morning Mix-ups™ from **PepsiCo** attracted the attention of a few of *SN's* shoppers. This whole-grain blend of four other brand snacks and cereals meets HealthierUS School Challenge criteria for competitive foods and provides 2 grains/breads servings in school meal programs. It's available in 1.5-oz. single-serve bags. Currently available is a Honey Cinnamon flavor. "Great breakfast, snack, vending and after-school item," noted one shopper. "Good taste and was tested by kids," affirmed another.



J&J Snack Foods www.jjsnack.com



The BeneFIT® bars from **J&J Snack Foods** also had fans among the Secret Shoppers. These prebaked 51% whole-grain bars were seen as a great item for breakfast. "How easy: Add milk, juice

or fruit and breakfast is complete!" credited one shopper. Available in convenient single-serve packages, the bars contain no hydrogenated oil or high fructose corn syrup. They are available in Oatmeal Spice, Cranberry Orange and Maple Brown Sugar varieties. Another shopper also cited the company's line of stuffed sandwiches, finding it an option that "secondary students [at a school] with an a la carte program would enjoy for taste and portability."

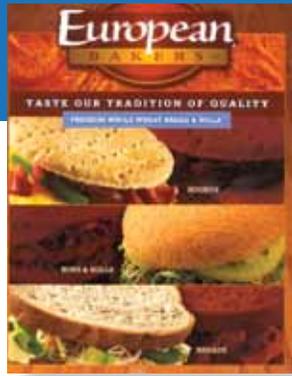
Sandwich Solutions



◀◀◀ **Schwan's Foodservice**
www.schwansfoodservice.com

New to the Big Daddy's™ line from **Schwan's Foodservice** is a Flatbread Sandwich that earned high marks from several SN shoppers. "Great eye

appeal. A versatile product for use with middle and high school. Very good flavor! A nice menu add or for use a la carte," reported one shopper. The sandwich features soft, 51% whole-grain flatbread that is filled with delicious ingredients. Shoppers liked that "it could be served as is or folded in half with different fillings." The item meets HealthierUS School Challenge and Alliance for a Healthier Generation criteria and is available in three flavors: BBQ Chicken, Southwest Chicken and Cheese. "We are always looking for new sandwich options," explained one shopper. "These seemed like an easy, healthy option and like something kids are getting in restaurants.



◀◀◀ **Flowers Bakeries**
www.europeanbakers.com

Operators looking for an alternative to conventional square sandwich breads might want to consider the 100% Whole Wheat Sandwich Rounds from the **Flowers Bakeries** division of European Bakers, Ltd. Featuring just 1 g of fat, 5 g of fiber and no high fructose corn syrup, they are "an attractive, healthy alternative to bread," cited one shopper.

▶▶▶ **AdvancePierre**
www.advancepierre.com

The low-sodium offerings of **AdvancePierre** made an impact on a number of SN shoppers. The company's low-sodium burger earned compliments for its flavor and texture. "One of the best further-processed hamburger patties I've tasted—low-sodium or otherwise," praised one shopper, who placed an order as soon as she returned home after the conference. "The taste and texture were excellent. The color and appearance of the product would appeal to the student market, and it's cost comparable to products I'm currently buying," reported another shopper. With less than 100 mg sodium per burger, it's flame-broiled to seal in flavor and juices. The company's Simply Grilled Chicken entrée (another low-sodium option) also scored with the team, as did its Graham Snackers™, a longstanding favorite that "has been upgraded to whole grain. It's delicious, practical and nutrient content-enhanced," cited one shopper.



The Turkey Sausage Patty from **JTM** was cited by shoppers for flavor and likely student acceptance. "It looked like a beef burger—although darker than beef, since they use thigh meat. It was very tasty. The acceptability factor is high," noted one *SN* shopper.

Other products from the company also caught the attention of the magazine's shopping team. In particular, a "reasonably priced Alfredo Cheese Sauce that could be processed with commodity cheddar cheese—the flavor, as well as the texture, of the product was great!" said one shopper. The sauce is a new reduced-fat, reduced-sodium offering.

Another shopper credited JTM's line of Asian Sauces: "They are flavorful, but reduced in sodium. We can make a variety of dishes with a limited number of unseasoned commodity proteins, reducing SKUs for our distributor and warehouse and increasing menu variety."

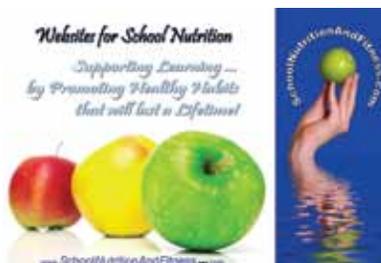


« « « « **JTM**
www.jtmfoodgroup.com

Key Connections

» » » » **SFSPac Food Service Sanitation Systems**
www.sfspac.com

SFSPac is taking its expertise in food safety and sanitation education to the next level with an online training and procedure instruction system. Its new Learning Portal was praised by several *SN* shoppers. "It's a great teaching tool for staff and substitute training," cited one, cautioning, "For SFSPac customers—but what an excellent added service!" Through an online community, users can take courses, test their knowledge and track progress. Directors can log in to view employee participation, create reports and manage their team's activities. Shoppers liked the documentation feature and the ability to keep up with CEUs. The company is, said one shopper, "a well-informed group; they understand us as customers."



« « « « **SchoolNutritionandFitness.com**
www.schoolnutritionandfitness.com

School nutrition professionals are required to wear several different hats. And while many enjoy their marketing responsibilities, most would rather not spend time on learning behind-the-scenes technology requirements of developing a website. That's why **SchoolNutritionandFitness.com** made an impact on members of *SN*'s shopping team. The company offers turnkey

websites for a district's food and nutrition department, customizing such features as meal applications, menus, wellness policy and prepayment information, and offering teaching tools, lesson plans, interactive games and healthy recipes for home. "The site provides vital information to all the spokes of the wheel," noted one shopper. "I love the idea and can't wait to share it with my administration." Another shopper expressed equal enthusiasm: "My website can look good, and I don't have to be a programmer!"

Equipped for the Future

Using more locally sourced fresh produce in your school nutrition operation? *SN*'s Secret Shoppers recommend you check out the X-Green™ Produce Safety System from **Duke Manufacturing**. The unit injects a wash solution into a cold, agitated bath to remove pesticides, wax, soil and bacteria from produce. It automatically monitors and corrects temperature and pH, and the system includes reporting and traceability features, including label printing. One shopper called it a "great vegetable/fruit washing system that will help reduce waste and extend shelf life." Another thought, "It would be very useful in a high-volume operation with a central kitchen."

Shoppers also cited the company's Serving System Units, calling them "upscale cafeteria solutions that can create an atmosphere of excitement; students will think they are in a food court, and that will help participation."



» » » » **Duke Manufacturing**
www.dukemfg.com

» » » » **Thermo Compaction Systems, Inc.**
www.thermocompaction.com

While many school districts would like to do better in going green, they may not have recycling pickup, compost sites or the ability to use permanent ware. That's why several Secret Shoppers were excited by the solution offered by **Thermo Compaction Systems, Inc.** The company's patent-pending Styrofoam Densification Unit melts up to 1,800 food-contaminated foam lunch trays into a single dense block. The block can be sent to the landfill, or (if service is available) it can be picked up for recycling into biofuel. "It saves on waste disposal volume and costs—love it!" said one shopper.



» » » » **Low-Temp Industries, Inc.**
www.lowtempind.com

"Food wells that can individually switch from hot to cold with the flip of a switch—really neat!" That's how one of *SN*'s Secret Shoppers described this find from **Low-Temp Industries**. QuickSwitch-Hot/Cold Drop-ins is a patent-pending two-well unit that can be used wet or dry and switch between hot, cold or freeze modes. "It's a steamtable unit that, with a flip of a switch, can be a hot well today and a cold well tonight," explained another shopper. A third praised the unit's "very innovative space-saving design," while a fourth noted that its versatility "makes the ability to change menus more flexible."





▶▶▶▶ **Form Plastics**
www.grab-n-gogreen.com

Districts with large high schools or overall higher enrollment may want to look into the Grab N Go Green natural heat-seal packaging unit from **Form Plastics**. “We are offering wrap sandwiches at our high school and have been struggling with finding the right container,” reported one shopper. “These containers are compostable—we are starting a composting program this year—and a machine seals the package.” The environmentally friendly packages can be recycled and composted and are available in multiple sizes for sandwiches, a small salad, large salad, entrées and more. The paperboard material includes a plastic window to see the contents. “It’s attractive packaging that’s compostable,” noted another shopper. “Great for grab ‘n’ go and vending.” And several shoppers commented on the affordability of the system, calling it “rather inexpensive at about \$800.”

Healthy Taste



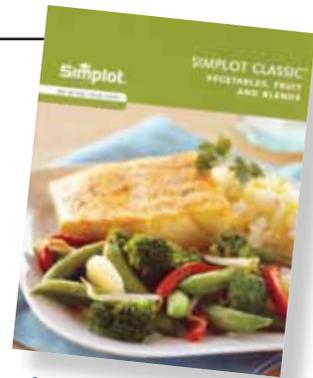
▶▶▶▶ **Rich Chicks**
www.richchicks.biz

One of the top finds from ANC 2010 was rediscovered by Nashville’s Secret Shoppers: The Premium Nutrition Line of chicken products from **Rich Chicks**. “I love the amount of fat, calories, etc., that this product does *not* have! Great quality as far as look, taste and appearance go,” applauded one shopper about the company’s boneless wings. The line, which includes popcorn chicken, tenders, fillets and wings, features a proprietary, all-natural process to reduce fat, calories and sodium while keeping items moist and delicious. “Outstanding taste,” raved another shopper. “25-75% lower in fat than the competition and 50% lower in sodium.” A third testified: “I tasted a product that was held for 90 minutes, and it was moist, crisp and delicious.”



▶▶▶▶ **Good Harbor Fillet**
www.goodharborfillet.com

“I saw endless booths of breaded fish sticks and breaded fish patties. But this innovative, tasty, plain fish fillet was coated with a light, Mexican-seasoned glaze,” reported one of *SN*’s hard-working shoppers. She was referring to the Grilled Fajita Haddock Portions offered by **Good Harbor Fillet**. Containing both haddock and pollock, the item can be cooked in a conventional or convection oven. “This product adds spicy good taste to an ordinary fish product,” credited another shopper. “Great flavor—not dry,” reported a third.



▶▶▶▶ **Simplot**
www.simplotfoods.com

A range of products from **Simplot** earned favor in the eyes of *SN*’s Secret Shoppers. Among these were its Simplot Sweet fries: “This product fits HealthierUS School Challenge criteria and was delicious. The fries held up and were still crunchy after one hour. I also loved the ‘wheel’ of recipes, a tool to pair products with different seasonings and dips. It’s a great way to introduce sweet potatoes to kids!” reported one enthusiastic shopper.

Another cited the Culinary Select™ Edamame, which can be used to make hummus. “It would be good with a southwestern flair—similar to guacamole. Very tasty,” credited this shopper.

The company’s Simplot Classic® Vegetable Blends also earned notice. “The new blends and flavors are imaginative for different menu applications,” said one shopper, specifically referencing the Meadow (carrots, green beans, zucchini, squash), Santa Fe (corn, broccoli florets, black beans, red peppers) and Country Garden Vegetables and Pasta (rotini, broccoli, corn, pepper) blends.



◀◀◀◀ **H&H Brands**
<http://hnhbrands.com>

“One inventory item with many uses—Yee-Ha!” That’s one shopper sentiment that can be echoed by school nutrition operators across the country. *SN*’s shopper was referencing a 30-second salsa from **H&H Brands**, discovered at ANC. Mix this seasoning “with your own USDA canned, diced tomatoes to produce a tasty, inexpensive salsa,” explained another shopper. It also can be used to spice meats like ground turkey or beef for meatloaf, taco/burrito fillings, Spanish rice, sour cream dip, fruits, dressings and more. “The product arrives in a dry form; mix with your tomato products or ranch dressing for your own level of spiciness,” noted another shopper.

◀◀◀◀ **Basic American Foods**
www.baf.com

Some new formulations of old favorites got the thumbs’ up from *SN*’s Secret Shopper team. Among these were the Smart Servings™ offerings in the Potato Pearls® line from **Basic American Foods**. “This low-sodium potato product tastes like real, unseasoned, unflavored potato,” noted one shopper. And Santiago® Lowfat Vegetarian Refried Beans received acclaim for being “an ‘instant’ style of product that is tasty!” Another shopper credited the dehydrated bean product for having “acceptable flavor and portability.” One shopper didn’t exactly “discover” this product line: “We currently use these products; they are easy to prepare, have great flavor and now are lowfat.”



◀◀◀◀
Rich Products
www.richsfoodservice.com/k12

Shoppers found solutions for both breakfast and lunch at the **Rich Products**

booth. For the morning meal, they cited the company's Ultimate Breakfast Round (UBR®). Available in two varieties, the 100% whole-grain treat is a good source of fiber and protein. In addition to the Blueberry version, the company has introduced Sunberry Blast, which includes oranges, cranberries and sweet potatoes. Shoppers approved: "Super new flavor that kids will love for breakfast. Glad to see a new flavor for an already-popular breakfast item."

For lunch menus, the company's Shrimp Poppers earned a positive review. Made with whole grains and reduced in sodium from its original formulation, the product was deemed to have "good bite, with crunch; the flavor also was good."

▶▶▶▶
McCain Foods USA
www.mccain4schools.com



Not sure how you are going to meet new menu standards calling for increased orange vegetables? Some of *SN's* Secret Shoppers recommend offerings from **McCain Foods**.

The company's Harvest Splendor line features Sweet Potato Bites that were deemed "Absolutely delicious, with a cute shape and good texture," by one shopper. Another has confidence that kids will eat *these* sweet potatoes, given "the shape and the taste. Presentation can make the difference." The Bites have a flatter coin-like shape that's a change from the traditional "tater tot."

One shopper thinks the line's Slim Stiks fries will be a winner: "A delicious and nutritious way to introduce students to sweet potatoes. The crispy texture is something I think my elementary students will prefer. I plan to add this item to my bid." Shoppers also cited McCain's Farmers Kitchen Spicy Oven-Baked Potato Crinkles ("The fry is not pre-baked, but has great flavor and kick for secondary students; it's sure to be a crowd pleaser.") and a mini frittata that is still in development.

HELP!

Where Can I Find...

- School Breakfast Program participation trends?
- Fast facts about scratch cooking in schools?
- A quick compendium of federal regulations affecting school nutrition programs?
- Statistics about the 100 largest school districts?
- A typical bid cycle calendar?
- Definitions of Provisions 1, 2 and 3?

You'll find these answers (and more) in SNA's **Little Big Fact Book: The Essential Guide to School Nutrition**. Updated for 2011, this must-have overview is the perfect introduction to the K-12 school segment.

GET YOUR COPIES TODAY!

Share with your superintendent, new supervisors, brokers, state/federal legislators and others.



Visit schoolnutrition.org/bookstore to order.

Tools to Use

▶▶▶▶ Polar Ware www.polarware.com

Some simple solutions can make all the difference. *SN's* Secret Shoppers discovered one-piece color-coded loons from **Polar Ware**. This series of six different portion size serving spoons are color-coded by size and come both solid and perforated. The "unique serving spoons" feature a special contour handle with a patent-pending Scoop-n-Lift feature that allows you to use the utensil itself to lift a steamtable pan out of the well, while also preventing the utensil from slipping into the pan. Shoppers credited the company's Edge pan and EdgePro serving utensils with "new innovation in design to prevent burns."



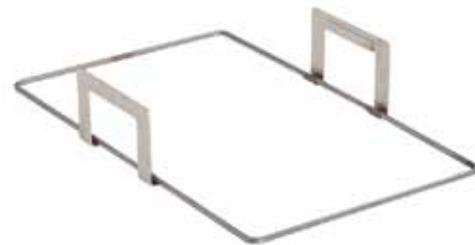
◀◀◀◀ Trellis Earth www.trellisearth.com

If your community is asking you to find Earth-friendly options for the disposable trays and cutlery you use in your cafeterias, *SN's* shoppers have found options worthy of your consideration. Check out the recyclable/compostable trays offered by **Trellis Earth**. "These trays are an option for replacing foam trays, which will not degrade, staying in landfills for hundreds of years," explained one shopper. The new trays are made from sustainable plant starches that are strong enough to go

in a microwave but do break down in landfills and compost programs. Shoppers also applauded other offerings in the line, including cutlery, napkins and garbage bags.

▶▶▶▶ GA Systems www.gasystemsmfg.com

"Very simplistic, but very effective and economical," reported one Secret Shopper of the new Pan Lifting Ring from **GA Systems**. This tool slides under steamtable pans, allowing employees to easily lift them from wells. Another shopper calls it "a great idea and product," while a third credits it as a "clever device....safety is a key element of the design."



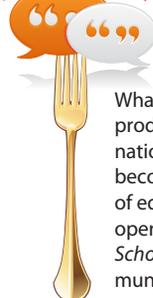
BONUS WEB CONTENT

This year's *School Nutrition*

Secret Shopper team discovered more products than we could showcase in

the pages of this issue. But you can read about an additional 30 Exhibit Hall shopping "finds" online. Visit www.schoolnutrition.org/snmagazine, then click on "Current Issue" to access this web-exclusive feature.

Side Dish



What is an example of a memorable product that you discovered at a national or state conference that has become a menu staple, key piece of equipment or other part of your operation today? Visit "Side Dish," *School Nutrition's* new online community and tell us all about it. Visit www.schoolnutrition.org/snn, log in and click on "Discussion Forums."