

Racing to the Finish

By Meg Major

In their ongoing pursuit to transform home-cooked meals into restaurant-quality fare through adventurous flavors, authentic ingredients and turnkey convenience, consumers are making fast friends with finishing sauces, which are handily carving a unique niche in supermarkets these days.

Indeed, as fresh, affordable, gourmet-positioned alternatives to frozen and powdered sauce mixes, finishing sauces are handy-dandy cross-promotional candidates for fresh poultry, seafood and meats, and can quickly add up to more in-store sales for retailers. The simplicity and "everyday gourmet" appeal offered by these ready-to-heat sauces, meanwhile, enables consumers to add savory flair to familiar dishes in a jiffy at price points that will stimulate trial and repeat purchases.

The category has steadily expanded at retail in the past year thanks to a host of entrants, including Northfield, Ill.-based Kraft Foods, which recently rolled out Philadelphia Cooking Creme, a spoonable, easy-to-blend line of cream sauces that can be effortlessly stirred into skillets, casseroles and pasta. Available in four varieties – Italian Cheese & Herb, Savory Garlic, Original, and Santa Fe Blend – the line offers "dollop-able, creamy consistency that's simple to measure, mix and melt" in a variety of dishes ranging from chicken and rice skillets to zesty enchiladas, notes Howard Friedman, SVP of marketing for Kraft's cheese and dairy group.



Kevin Fortun of
Fortun Foods

Kirkland, Wash.-based Fortun Foods has also made an impressive foray into the category with an eponymous line of Finishing Touch Sauces. Company founder Kevin Fortun, the entrepreneurial force behind Stockpot Soups and owner of Hundred Acre Winery in Napa, Calif., and Desert Sage restaurant in La Quinta, Calif., developed the gluten-free, fresh-refrigerated sauces.

Made with all natural ingredients, the 12-variety line showcases flavors from across the globe, with such choices as BBQ (Picnic in a Pan), Four Pepper, Marsala & Mushroom, and Rajun Cajun.

"Finishing sauces are an exciting new category that meets consumers' demands for fresh and healthy alternatives," says Mary Shepard, Fortun Foods' director of sales, noting that aside from tasting great, Fortun's finishing sauces are also gluten- and saturated-fat free, low in sodium, and on-trend with ethnic and international flavors. She additionally cites the multiple benefits for retailers:

"really adding a 'wow' factor to the meat and seafood department," helping to increase revenues, imparting differentiation and convenience to meal planning and cooking ideas, and reducing ingredient preparation and cleanup times.

All varieties of Fortun's 8-ounce finishing sauces carry a shelf life of 150 days and an SRP range of \$4.95 to \$5.95. Remaining true to his foodservice roots, Fortun – whose sauce line is also featured in signature dishes on the menu at Desert Sage – has also developed an easy-pack version for foodservice operators.