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Casing the case

The 2007 National Meat Case Study has finally hit the streets. And to many in the industry, the report is as popular as the latest Harry Potter book.

Few surveys give a clearer picture of the state of retail protein merchandising, and ways that merchants are driving—or reacting to—consumer buying behavior in supermarket meat and seafood departments.

Similar to previous studies that took place in 2002 and 2004, the latest research—which is based on audits of 121 supermarkets and 10 clubs stores in 38 states and 48 markets—gives a snapshot of the current dynamics of the meat case. (See “The Packaging Picture,” page 12.)

But with greater amounts of past data available for comparison, trends and changes are more apparent.

The study reveals, for instance, that merchants are giving greater respect to grinds. Ground beef was the only beef category to register an increase in the percentage of packages in the case, jumping to 36 percent, up from 34 percent in 2004 and 31 percent in 2002. In addition, the average number of ground beef SKUs was up 8 percent to 13.1 per store.

“Despite the higher cost, more people still want beef and that is an encouraging sign,” says Randy Irion, director of retail marketing for the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association.

A greater focus on private label also is evident. Store-branded chicken, for instance, has increased three-fold since the 2004 study, with 26 percent of chicken packages in the case sporting a private-label moniker.

“The study shows the importance retailers are putting on their brands,” notes Jerry Kelly, national coordinator, Retail Task Force, for the Cryovac Food Packaging Division of Sealed Air Corp., a sponsor of the study along with the Beef Checkoff and the Pork Checkoff. “There is a lot of equity in having a name on proteins.” **MDR**

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