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## THE MESSAGE **Carne consciousness**

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*It's no lie: The allure of the Hispanic market has meat processors pulling every string to create a winning marketing strategy.*

By Ann Bagel Storck, managing editor

It seems the story of Pinocchio isn't just kids' stuff anymore. These days, the National Pork Board is using it to pitch product to Hispanics.

One TV spot depicts two Latina moms chatting next to a supermarket meat case. Paying each other false compliments and, more important, taking shots at pork's nutritional profile cause their noses to grow. It's only when one mom corrects the other, explaining why pork can be a healthy choice, that her nose shrinks back to normal. "It's sort of a cultural reference to the idea of stretching the truth," says Ceci Snyder, assistant vice president of consumer marketing.

The truth is that many Hispanics have misperceptions about pork, particularly its healthfulness and food safety. But that doesn't mean they don't like to eat it. According to the NPD Group, Hispanics eat fresh pork as a main meal item 70 percent of the time.

So it makes sense that a new Pork Board campaign targets the Hispanic market with not only TV ads, but also promotional appearances by television personality Chef Gustavo, a brochure featuring pork mole recipes and a culinary arts exhibit in Los Angeles about the history of mole. The effort, focused on the Los Angeles and Dallas areas, is working to help retailers promote pork to Hispanics as well.

### **Don't assume**

The opportunities extend beyond pork. An August 2007 report from researcher Packaged Facts notes that there are more than 44 million Hispanics in the United States. By 2030, one in five Americans will be Hispanic, according to U.S. Census Bureau projections. Perhaps more significant, as early as 2010, Packaged Facts says Hispanics will have almost \$1.1 trillion in buying power.

That's not news to the San Jose Group, an advertising agency that has helped Hormel Foods target the Hispanic market since 2000. Last year, for example, Chicago-based SJG crafted the first-ever U.S. Spanish-language television commercial for Spam canned lunchmeat.

Given Hormel's track record with SJG, the processor was willing to go out on a bit of a limb this spring by working with both the agency and 12 undergraduates from Chicago's DePaul University. The students' project was to analyze a dozen Hormel brands - including Dinty Moore Beef Stew, Hormel Corned Beef Hash and Always Tender Pork Loins - not currently active in the Hispanic market, and determine if they should enter it.

Although SJG Executive Vice President Jennifer Woods notes that conclusions about the brands varied, she does highlight one main message: Don't assume that just because your product hasn't been used by a Hispanic audience, it can't be. "The speech I get all the time is, 'My products aren't Hispanic products,'" she says. "Well, are Cheerios a Hispanic product? Is McDonald's a Hispanic restaurant? If you market your product the right way and learn how it can fit into the Hispanic diet, you have a great chance to expand your franchise."

And Woods believes meat processors have an especially great chance. "Every piece of research we've ever done has shown that meat is absolutely a core staple for Hispanics," she notes. "If anybody in the food category should be marketing to this segment, it's meat companies."

**Homework assignment**

The National Cattlemen's Beef Association got that message loud and clear. In March, NCBA announced plans to create a national, Hispanic-focused retail outreach campaign. Research confirmed that Hispanics love beef, eating it four or more times a week, compared with the broader market, which eats beef only 3.3 times every two weeks. The challenge was finding the best ways for mainstream supermarkets to cash in.

Partnering with Irvine, Calif.-based agency HEILBrice, NCBA studied Hispanic consumers' shopping habits, why they choose certain stores and what they buy. "Traditional Hispanic recipes are made with thinly sliced cuts not commonly found in mainstream supermarkets," explains Jim Henger, executive director of retail marketing for NCBA. "If retailers want to market to this group, they need to carry these types of cuts."

NCBA also uncovered more general trends among Hispanic consumers, sometimes directly opposite those of the general population. "Hispanics are less interested in convenience items," Henger says. "They prefer to purchase fresh meat, take it home and prepare it." For that reason, NCBA also has advised retailers to have Spanish-speaking staffers available at the butcher counter.

The next step was developing a kit for retailers, including a bilingual dictionary listing Hispanic-oriented cuts, bilingual recipe labels and bilingual meat case signage. After tests of the materials are completed this fall in California, a nationwide rollout is planned for next year.

Doing that kind of research is key to succeeding in the Hispanic market, Woods emphasizes. "With food in the Hispanic market, it's all about the experience, what it represents," she says. "You need to find out how it is that your product best fits into that daily consumption with the Hispanic family. You need to do your homework." The meat industry isn't shying away from this assignment. "We know that the Hispanic population is growing," Henger says. "We know that they love beef. This is a huge opportunity."

And you don't need Pinocchio to teach you that's no lie.

**The campaign****El cerdo in the spotlight**

**Organization:** National Pork Board

**Agency:** Bromley Communications, San Antonio

**Target audience:** Hispanic moms in Dallas and Los Angeles

**TV spots:** In a play off the story of Pinocchio, two moms chatting at a supermarket meat case find their noses growing whenever they fib, paying each other false compliments or, more significant, taking shots at pork's nutritional profile. It's only when one mother begins touting the truth about pork's healthfulness that her nose shrinks back to normal size. The campaign also uses the established slogan, "El cerdo es bueno," which translates to, "Pork is good."

**Other elements:** Television personality Chef Gustavo is embarking on media tours in both cities to educate Hispanic consumers about the benefits of pork. He also developed pork mole recipes for a brochure. And in Los Angeles, the National Pork Board is sponsoring a culinary arts exhibit about the history of mole at the non-profit Plaza de la Cultura y Artes.

**The challenge:** Although Hispanics seem to enjoy eating pork - the NPD Group reports they eat fresh pork as a main meal item 70 percent of the time - they also have misperceptions about its food safety and healthfulness. "The myths are strong," confirms Ceci Snyder, assistant vice president of consumer marketing for the Pork Board.

The upside: Snyder says in many ways, the Hispanic audience is an easier target than the general market. "They still somewhat trust messages from companies," she asserts. "They're maybe not as jaded as the general market is."

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