

AHEAD OF WHAT'S NEXT

PROGRESSIVEGROCER

Healthy Discussion

By Barbara Ruhs



More than 20 registered dietitians (RDs) from leading supermarket chains gathered in Baltimore this past September to attend Progressive Grocer's Retail Dietitian Symposium, held in conjunction with Natural Products Expo East.

Dietitians earned continuing-education credits and learned the latest about health-and-wellness trends, non-caloric sweeteners, new labeling solutions to help consumers reduce sodium, and much more. The focus of the meeting was to bring together supermarket dietitians and industry experts to share ideas and current research on how to drive sales, measure impact and make a difference in public health.

Bridging the gaps between retail and health care creates both challenges and opportunities.

Exploring Natural Products

In the world of natural foods, it's easy to fall prey to health claims, trendy products and nutrition buzzwords. Weighing the scientific evidence and sorting fact from fiction are the skills RDs use to educate customers and category managers on products that make claims and may or may not offer health benefits.

While studying food packages, labeling claims and nutrition facts, and tasting products together at Expo East, my fellow RDs and I shared opinions and ideas on how to bring information back to our respective retailers. We sampled "free-from" products from Enjoy Life Foods, innovative fruit-and-veggie popsicles from Ruby Rockets, protein-packed Powerful Yogurt, and stevia-sweetened all-natural cola from Zevia, and we identified such trends as a variety of products featuring kale, chia, ancient grains and stevia, plus vegan, non-GMO and raw foods.

Retail Tools and Strategies

One of the goals of PG's symposium was to expose supermarket dietitians to retail tools and resources that can give us an edge in our roles. Jeffrey Gregori, VP of consumer and shopper analytics from the Schaumburg, Ill.-based Nielsen Co., explained methods to measure sales outcomes that included data on how to work effectively with category managers to enhance sales and promotions in stores. Cathy Polley, VP of health and wellness from the Arlington, Va.-based Food Marketing Institute, shared the latest retail health-and-wellness trends from FMI's 2013 Shopping for Health survey to explore how retail dietitians can leverage shopper trends to develop successful, competitive health-and-wellness programs.

Lasting Impressions

Meredith Mensinger, corporate dietitian for Redner's Warehouse Markets, based in Reading, Pa., says having strong ties with CPG companies "helps us to better communicate product innovation, brand messaging and incorporate these products into our retail health-and-wellness platforms."

At the symposium, Brian Levy, president of Chapel Hill, N.C.-based Pulse Health & Wellness, which connects health care professionals to quality branded products, offered key insights on how retail dietitians can help shape the

health care professionals to quality branded products, offered key insights on how retail dietitians can help shape the future of in store health-and-wellness marketing while simultaneously adding value to their retail brands, supplier partners and shoppers.

We ended the day with a panel discussion, featuring myself, Caroline Passerello, from Pennsylvania's Giant Eagle; and Leah McGrath, from Ingles Markets in North Carolina. Our panel highlighted strategies and ideas on how to measure impact and the return on investment. Clinically, we're trained to measure patient outcomes, but in the retail world, our value is typically measured in units and sales dollars. Bridging the gaps between retail and health care creates both challenges and opportunities.

The symposium gave supermarket dietitians a great forum to discuss these topics, and set the stage for future educational programs and networking to bring health and wellness to a new level at retail.

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