

## Technology:

# Enhanced labeling capabilities

by Lynn Petrak

**D**espite the digital era, one should never underestimate the power of the tangible. For all the smartphones, social media platforms, e-commerce channels and electronic promotions, consumers have a physical, emotional and thoughtful connection with those things they can see, touch and taste.

"You can talk about social media, but I always think the label is the best means for connecting with consumers," says Steve Armstrong, independent advisor on food law and regulation for EAS Consulting Group. "It conveys specific information about a specific product to people."

According to Armstrong, the package is a conduit for messages that manu-

facturers want to convey to their end users. "Consumers buy foods for a lot of different reasons, and many of these concerns are things a label has to address because of regulations requiring ingredient information, nutritional disclosures and name and contact information," he says. "Because that communication occurs in the grocery aisle at the moment of purchase, it is the package that allows a brand to put its best foot forward and build consumer trust."

## Syncing up with SmartLabel

On-package labels with the correct product and company information are a focus of many bakery and snack operations. Armstrong advises that it's important to keep priorities in mind with regard to labeling. The first steps are to know what interests consumers and know what is required by law and regulations. If companies follow those guidelines, they can develop an effective label.

To use labels in a proactive, comprehensive way, bakery and snack companies can take advantage of resources like the SmartLabel program that was developed by the Grocery Manufacturers Association (GMA) based on feedback and consideration from consumers as well as retailers and manufacturers.

Roger Lowe, executive vice-president, strategic communications, GMA, says consumers are hungry for more information about the products they buy, and SmartLabel meets that need by putting detailed information — more than could ever fit on a package label — right at their fingertips. QR codes allow consumers to scan the package and instantly pull up additional product

information, giving those who want to know what ingredient is in the product — and why — access to all the information they need.

"And remember, not every consumer wants the same information," Lowe says. "Some will want to know details about allergens, including whether a product is processed in a facility or on a line that also processes an allergen. SmartLabel provides that information."

Food companies, in turn, are looking for ways to provide such information via package labels. Bakery and snack manufacturers have shown strong interest in SmartLabel to provide ingredient and other information to consumers, according to Lowe.

## Supply meets demand

To meet consumers' interest for more information, packaging suppliers offer a range of materials and technologies designed to help food companies use their labels as tools.

Joanna Mooberry, marketing and communications for Mettler-Toledo, said that changes in labeling, driven by consumer demands, regulations and other issues, are opening the door to innovations. "With consumer tastes and preferences leaning toward GMO labeling, vegetarian options and other niche dietary restrictions, we are seeing demand among manufacturers to better monitor labeling variations that are seen on these specific packages," she says. "As such, manufacturers are looking for ways to efficiently monitor and track labeling variations to ensure products are marked accordingly."

Among other offerings, Mettler-Toledo provides vision inspection solutions to monitor quality with systems that can inspect packages and labels with graphic IDs, barcode information and more. "Our vision systems are designed to detect many types of optical characters, barcodes and variable inkjet printing," Mooberry says. The company has an advanced vision library and suite of tools embedded in its software, including a new dot print tool that can be used to detect variable inkjet printing.



THE SMARTLABEL PROGRAM GIVES INSTANT ACCESS TO A WIDE RANGE OF INFORMATION. PHOTO: GMA