

A Golden Future

As it approaches its 50th anniversary, Swiss Farms is focused on self-improvement while retaining its sense of self

By Angela Hanson

In Pennsylvania, a state full of serious convenience foodservice competitors, it is easy to think that the market is dominated by large chains. But in Delaware County, small operator Swiss Farms has leveraged its strengths to cultivate an enthusiastic customer base for its drive-thru markets and maintain it for nearly five decades.

“We’ve been in business for almost 50 years, and there’s something to be said about that,” said Jaclyn Daley, director of marketing. “We have a really loyal following in this area.”

Headquartered in Broomall, Pa., the 13-store operator made a name for itself by combining the added speed and convenience of a drive-thru with staples and other items typically found in a grocery store, plus freshly prepared food that is restaurant quality.

“You’re getting the types of products that you would either have to sit down in a restaurant to get or have to walk around a large-scale grocery store to get,” Daley said. “We’re trying to make our product mix drastically different than the competition, so we’re doing something you can’t get anywhere else.”

Swiss Farms isn’t content to rely on its legacy, though. Particularly since new President and CEO Scott Simon came on board nearly a year ago, the chain has been exploring ways to improve itself and grow, while staying true to what its existing customer base appreciates.

A major part of the evolution is development of its fresh food program, which took root in 2009 when the retailer built a commissary in the back of its Milmont Park, Pa., store. Since then, the commissary



The Swiss Farms store in Havertown, Pa., will soon sport this new look.

and its test kitchen have allowed Swiss Farms to self-distribute, delivering fresh products to its stores six days a week.

“Whatever we make that day is going out that day or the next day,” explained Justin Vignola, director of fresh food, who joined Swiss Farms last year. This self-reliance allows the company to make quick changes if it gets significant customer feedback, rather than having to go through a third party.

In recent months, Swiss Farms has significantly enhanced its foodservice offering by launching a line of fresh-made breakfast sandwiches; launching a premium coffee line; and adding signature meals to its Fresh Solutions line of freshly prepared meals.

Vignola, who has significant foodservice industry experience and has opened multiple restaurants, was brought on board to head up development of Fresh Solutions. Along with creating new and improved products, Vignola is developing seasonal menus.

The breakfast daypart is particularly important to Swiss Farms, as a large number of its customers pass

through the drive-thru on their way to work in the morning. The breakfast sandwich line Vignola developed features house-made sausage, pork roll and more, and includes a lean option of egg white, spinach and cheese on a multigrain English muffin.

It is a conscious choice to give customers a healthier option in every category of food.

“We wanted to make a shift,” Daley said. “Not to change up the whole store into better-for-you, but a good portion of it, to be able to offer that to our customers.”

The company went even farther by hiring dietitian Audrey Hasse, whose nutrition philosophy is that “eating should be fun.” Hasse’s job is to curate better-for-you food choices and develop recipes using ingredients available at Swiss Farms.

“The focus there is not only on the fresh food side, but also on our traditional packaged grocery items,” Daley noted. “Our product mix has been the same for a long time, and people are more conscious today about what they’re putting into their bodies.”

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Along with these fresh-food and better-for-you pushes, another major milestone for Swiss Farms was the June 2016 launch of its new coffee program, which includes three premium roasts. Since the program rolled out, coffee sales have spiked, according to Daley. Customers especially enjoy using Swiss Farms milk — delivered five days a week — as their creamer.

“It’s the freshest milk in the area,” she said.

THE SWISS FARMS BRAND

The company is developing more than its fresh menu and product mix; it’s enhancing its brand presence, too, through a combination of services and the face it shows the community.

A Swiss Farms mobile app, loyalty program and



Swiss Farms combines the speed and convenience of a drive-thru with staples typically found in a grocery store, plus restaurant-quality freshly prepared food.

ecommerce platform are scheduled to launch this spring, and the company gave its decades-old rooster mascot a name to prepare it for a more active role in the company’s marketing. Cruiser the Rooster received his moniker after customers were invited to submit their suggestions online.

With all that’s happening inside Swiss Farms’ markets, customers will soon see a change outside as well. The Swiss Farms store in Havertown, Pa., will receive a significant facelift in the form of the company’s first “huge renovation,” according to Chris Gray, director of IT/special projects. The store will remain open during construction.

Following its completion, the company plans to update a few more legacy stores per year.

“We’re investing a lot in our legacy stores right now,” Gray said. While Swiss Farms has done some light renovations in recent months, “we’re going to kick it up a notch,” he added.

Behind all these initiatives is the support of new CEO Simon, who is spearheading Swiss Farms’ development while balancing it with what customers have liked about the brand for decades.

“His main push is creating growth while maintaining a reputation as a trusted local market and strengthening ties within the surrounding communities,” Daley said.

The continued growth of Swiss Farms could even eventually include a Swiss Farms location outside of Delaware County. The company is open to expansion, but only if it can do so while maintaining its current level of brand quality and service. **CSN**