

# ACROSS

## *the Board*



The Sea-cuterie board at Chicago-based Travelle.

With the help of research and marketing boards, chefs are utilizing popular (and not-so-common) protein items in new ways—particularly with charcuterie.

By Sam Ujvary

**P**rotein is essential to help our bodies maintain adequate health and prevent muscle loss—a common phobia that has catapulted supplemental powder and meal bar production. While these work for a quick fix, complete meals allow us to obtain other vitamins and nutrients. What's more, animal proteins provide what can't necessarily be found in fruits, vegetables and grains alone. With a broadening realization of the health benefits, our bodies are literally ravenous for this essential nutrient. But in this quest for dietary fulfillment, our taste buds need to feel exhilarated.

Thanks to reliable charcutiers who once provided chefs with different cuts of preserved products, charcuterie is just one way culinary experts are currently spicing up their menus. And they've expanded well beyond the standard pork options, now featuring a curated selection of cured meats, breads and tangy jams or condiments.

Employing all cuts of meats, chefs are able to whip up pâtés and crépinettes, sopressatas and chorizos, and whole-muscle cuts in order to create low-maintenance, shareable charcuterie boards that continue to be a great starter and make a great platform for chefs to

creatively show off their skill set.

But what would these skill sets be without their spotlighted ingredients? We have collaborations, marketing boards to thank for educating kitchens across the country on each highlighted protein.

Boards like the Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute (ASMI), the National Pork Board (NPB) and so many others exist to promote each respective protein to foodservice operators and distributors; to maintain the ecosystems that create their livelihoods; and to keep consumers knowledgeable of both their practices and the benefits, creating a renewed interest in the role pro-

tein plays in our everyday lives.

### Turf

Pork is a powerful partner on a plate, and chefs are leveraging its versatility in new ways. The National Pork Board (NPB) aims to elevate pork consumption on a global scale. According to the Pork Checkoff, the growth rate of pork outpaces other proteins, and the NPB has implemented a five-year plan to keep momentum going. Its goals are threefold: to enhance consumer trust in pork production; to drive sustainable production; and to grow consumer demand. Director of Foodservice Marketing



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and Innovation, Stephen Gerike, focuses on objective three: to grow consumer demand. Specifically, he works to provide culinary education. "We're constantly trying to provide innovative ideas for how to use pork based on what's happening in the business today," he says. "The idea is to educate as many people as we can so they're confident using pork."

Perhaps among the most confident in using pork is Executive Chef Craig Deihl of Charleston, S.C.-based Cypress. Recognized for his charcuterie program, Chef Deihl likes to have fun with craft butchery by breaking down hams that are offered on the menu. "Working with pig is my favorite," he says. "Particularly the Guinea Hog." Now, the Guinea Hog isn't your everyday pig. With a high fat-to-meat ratio and a size too small to suffice a 310-seat restaurant, this pig wouldn't be considered a culinary front-runner for standard dishes. Luckily for Cypress, it's perfectly suited for charcuterie boards. Cypress' quest for excellence while using superior products like the Guinea Hog has helped pave the James Beard-nominated way for the Lowcountry restaurant. Steadfast in his belief of presenting only the best meat for his patrons, Chef Deihl stands behind The Butcher's Guild as one of its audacious members who guides other professionals in butchery and the utilization of meat-based products.

Also a big fan of featuring pork on his Michelin-rated menu, Chef Andrew Zimmerman of Chicago's Sepia once showcased his swine-cooking abilities by including red cooked pig's ears on one of his charcuterie boards. "Charcuterie was born from cooks being thrifty with their trim and less-prized cuts of meat," says Chef Zimmerman. In most areas of the world, pig ears would fall right into that category. Sourcing really great ingredients is

an essential element of Sepia's success. "You can't make great food with mediocre ingredients," he says.

With a last name like Bacon, it's possible that Chef Jeremiah Bacon's career was written in the stars. The Charleston native has two thriving hometown restaurants—The Macintosh and Oak Steakhouse. His position at both has earned him multiple James Beard nominations over the years. While The Macintosh features a seasonal surf-and-turf charcuterie plate, Oak Steakhouse focuses more on the turf to accent the menu. "We're certified Angus Beef Prime [at Oak], so we get some of the most beautiful and prized meat," Chef Bacon says. The Butcher's Plate at Oak, while exquisitely prepared, is driven largely by its inventory. "We butcher a lot of beef, so it's dictated a little more by trim," he adds.

Just as each aforementioned protein has its own marketing board, so too does beef like that served at Oak Steakhouse. An operating committee implements promotion and marketing research for the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA)—the latest of which involves looking into consumption patterns of Millennials. "The Millennial generation is 80 million strong in this country," says Dave Zino, executive chef for NCBA. He works with chefs and processors to provide education on what will appeal to both Millennials and the market as a whole.

#### Surf

Shoreline inhabitants are inherently healthier than their hinter-

land brethren. Studies have repeatedly established the correlation between heart health and Omega-3s. On the other end of the carnivore spectrum, the Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute (ASMI) does for the sea what the NPB does for

the swine and the NCBA for cattle. The oceans predate life on earth, so ASMI diligently protects what they consider to be the state's greatest asset. It allocates a seven-member board that's made up of processors and fishermen with the task of en-



PB Catch's Seacuterie board



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sure that the needs of the harvest are balanced with the needs of the ecosystem. The board—and all fishers—help regulate this by ceasing the season once an established quota has been met. According to their research, about half of all seafood production in the United States comes from Alaska's 34,000 mile coastline. It is home to the most abundant seafood stocks in the world, so the seafood industry is a vital component of the state's economy. Alaska takes its seafood so seriously in fact, that they remain the only state with a constitutional mandate regulating the utilization and development on a sustained yield principle. "We are one of the world leaders for sustainable fisheries management," says Claudia Hogue, foodservice director for ASMI. "They actually wrote into the state constitution that all fisheries must be managed sustainably."

Another group with a long history of sustainability and traceability is deeply rooted in an overarching family of lobstermen. Maine's self-regulated industry has been practicing re-

sponsible fishing for more than 100 years. Small-boat fishers don't have a mandated season for lobster; they typically live by the this-is-how-we've-always-done-it season. The Maine Lobster Marketing Collaborative (MLMC) was the answer to the surplus of lobsters available due to one year's unexpected early arrival. "There wasn't enough capacity to handle it," says Matt Jacobson, executive director of MLMC. "There was no marketing effort, and it's such an important commodity for Maine." This unprecedented opportunity has allowed the last of the hunter/gatherers to tell their sea-to-table story.

Lobster has grown to be a compelling restaurant trend in recent years. Chefs are reimagining the crustacean; creating innovative dishes that play on both lobster as well as other sea life's versatility. Chef Ben Pollinger is a Maine Lobster chef advocate; he chooses to serve high-protein lobster from Maine at his restaurant, Oceana, in New York City. Likewise, Chef Pollinger takes advantage of ASMI's re-



New York-based Oceana utilizes information from the ASMI and MLMC to advocate fresh fish and lobster served on the menu.




Chef Craig Deihl prepares charcuterie plates at his Charleston, S.C.-based Cypress restaurant.

sources. He serves fish found in the pristine waters of Alaska like Wild Alaskan Salmon because he believes sustainable, wild fish is always the best choice when it's available. "It all starts with the product," he says.

The seafood take on charcuterie is growing in popularity in areas that are both conducive to obtaining fresh fish daily as well as unexpected locations, like Chicago-based Travelle. With an affinity for creating small plates, Chef Tim Graham began to realize his original charcuterie idea didn't fit on the menu as a traditional meat-centric dish. As his idea began to crystallize, his team prepared charcuterie analogs out of products from the ocean, morphing the dish into a seacuterie board. Featuring a Tuna Bresola—a take on the air cured beef from Italy—the fish is dry rubbed twice and hang-dried, then sliced thin and served as a traditional Bresola would be. Preparing traditional meat-heavy dishes with a seafood substitute is often accomplished with a trial-and-error method. "Sometimes it feels like we have no reference for what we want to accomplish," says Chef Graham. "That is when we just push on, take good notes, and adjust as necessary."

It's not difficult to find a fresh cut of tuna in South Florida, so the group at PB Catch in Palm

Springs has some fun in the kitchen with its food trials. "We started experimenting with the curing and smoking process of different fish," says Executive Chef Aaron Black. The final product: a seacuterie selection that provides the best combinations of texture and taste when cured and prepared in a way that might be found on a traditional charcuterie plate; salmon pastrami, smoked trout and scallops, and octopus torchon—a marine version of a foie gras preparation method where the meat is wrapped, poached and chilled. From concept to execution, PB Catch puts a lot of thought into its menu because it's the signature culinary technique that they are trying to convey. With these sea-friendly takes on menu items, chefs are able to call to mind their own influences and upbringings with inspiration from around the globe.

High-protein food choices play a major role in our health—and obtaining it from animal sources offers more flavor varieties. These chefs exist to provide restaurant-goers with new delectable offerings, and these marketing boards exist to aide chefs in their new understanding of what each has to offer. Chefs are armed with pork, beef and seafood as their artists' tools, and these [charcuterie] boards act as their blank canvas. 



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