

Egyptian Promotion Cooks Up U.S. Export Success

By Manal El-Masry

Take a hefty measure of quality U.S. foods and ingredients, add a competition featuring six of Cairo's top culinary artists and mix with key Egyptian importers, and you've got FAS' "Great American Food Fest."

This post-initiated trade show cooked up \$218,400 in sales of U.S. consumer-ready products, a 12-percent increase over the previous year's show. Six of Cairo's five-star hotels were buying, with an expected

20-percent increase in imports of products for 2001.

The September 2000 promotion, which introduced 119 U.S. products to the Egyptian market, featured a special competition: 40 Egyptian chefs competed to create the best recipe using U.S. ingredients. Six were selected for a final competition at the Cairo Marriott Hotel, site of the Great American Food Fest each fall.

A resulting cookbook, "The 1st American Recipe Book," featuring all the recipes in the competition, was distributed to top Cairo hotels and supermarkets. Its culinary compositions, with their accent on U.S. food ingredients, should fuel Egyptian imports for some time to come.

A Major Mideast Debut for U.S. Food

This annual festival features a wide range of products intended not only for the hotel and restaurant industry but also for upscale consumers. Products such as high-quality beef, smoked salmon, turkey products, dressings, seasonings, beer and wine were among those featured.

The food festival saw the debut of McCormick spices, Nabisco products, A-1 Steak Sauce, Royal Baking Powder and Minute Maid juices in this market.

Alaa Abdel-Rahman, CEO of Red Sea World, was one of the nine importers participating.

"The Great American Food Fest is an outstanding event to introduce products,"





A bilingual cookbook is just the thing to inspire an Egyptian chef.

Cairo in coordination with the Egyptian Chefs Association.

Participating chefs had to cook American dishes using recipes where 90 percent of the ingredients were of U.S. origin.

To recruit the chefs, fliers were sent to 700 five-star hotels and Class A restaurants. A panel of international chefs selected the six winning contestants who did the live cooking show. They were selected according to the best menu, with appetizer, main dish and dessert; the use of the most advertised ingredients; and presentation.

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he said. "Chefs from other hotels attend the event and eventually buy the U.S. products for their hotels."

Abdel-Rahman also supplied the food for the cooking competition and a buffet for conference attendees, featuring traditional American foods.

"The festival is ideal to introduce new-to-market products and increase the consumption of products already available here," said Abdel-Rahman. "As a result of the fest, our sales of U.S. food products increase by 8 to 10 percent every year. Our sales of U.S. products have increased by 40 percent since we started the event in 1998."

And did Abdel-Rahman bring any new products last year to entice cooks and customers?

"Yes, we introduced 58 flavors of McCormick spices, and currently, all hotels in Egypt take McCormick spices," he said. "Last year we introduced Monterey Jack and Pepperjack cheese."

Cooking Up U.S. Exports in Cairo

Last year, as the six finalists simmered and sauteed their way through, winning entrees also enticed hotel guests to stop and ask what's cooking. This, too, is a great advertisement for U.S. foods and ingredients.

Chef Mona Amer, winner of the 2000 chef's competition, said she was happy about participating and planned to compete this fall in American Food Fest 2001.

"This was my first participation in a live food competition," she said. "I believe it was very effective. All the chefs communicated well with the audience. And when you use American ingredients in front of the public, it has a great effect."

Chef Amer is no stranger to the use of U.S. food ingredients.

"I always use American ingredients in my cooking as you can get a better taste and they prepare quickly," she said. "I use American wheat flour, sauces, toppings for the desserts."

"What we are missing from the United States are more bakery ingredients. We need different types of flour, such as corn meal flour and semolina, also natural preservatives and different types of cheese."

And did Chef Amer have any advice for U.S. food companies looking at the Egyptian market?

"Egyptian consumers are not easily convinced, so U.S. companies have to work on advertising and promotional materials," she said.

The competition was sponsored by FAS



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