

## Giving grease the slip

Boyer's Food Markets' use of grease-absorbing pads makes its rotisserie chicken program cleaner, more attractive—and safer.

By Joseph Tarnowski

**A**t Boyer's Food Markets the only grease you'll find is on the wheels of the shopping carts. But it wasn't always that way at the 17-unit independent based in Orwigsburg, Pa., according to John Boyer, who co-owns the company along with his three siblings, and holds the title of v.p. of real estate, buildings, and equipment.

"Rotisserie chickens are a big thing at Boyer's Food Markets," says Boyer. "We promote the items with stuff like side dishes and hot Italian bread. It makes it easy for Mom coming home from work—she can have dinner on the table in the 15 minutes she's allotted."

But when grease from the packaging causes Mom to slip and fall, or ruins her new silk blouse, then it's not so easy for her anymore—or for Boyer's.

"We've had a couple of incidents where grease leaked out of the containers," recalls Boyer. "We used the dome containers with the handles, and sometimes the seal gets loose from people wandering around the store with them."

For a retailer that prides itself on service—foodservice in particular—the potential for mess or accidents wasn't acceptable. "We're in a lot of small towns around central Pennsylvania," explains Boyer. "We try to find our niche by providing a high level of service." The grocer's reputation as a destination for hot food draws crowds of local workers and residents for lunch

and dinner, and as a result the stores, which range from 20,000 to 35,000 square feet, will on average sell upwards of 30 rotisserie chickens a day.

One of Boyer's strongest customer demographics, however, is probably also the most accident-prone: older consumers, who prefer his smaller, more manageable stores to the 100,000-square-foot superstores Boyer's competes against.

To make sure this shopper segment was accounted for, Boyer took the initiative of heading the company's safety committee. "We made a decision about a year or two ago that having one of the principals involved in the safety committee would be a good idea, insurance rates being what they are," he recounts. "We wanted to get a firm grasp on safety issues. We try to keep the costs down on our insurance, and there are discounts available for people who have

safety committees. So I became the chairman."

During his safety due diligence research, Boyer discovered that the company had experienced three slip-and-fall incidents or near-incidents caused by grease that had leaked onto store floors—not something a storeowner wants to hear.

Just as Boyer began to realize the nature of the problem, Penn Jersey Paper, which handles Boyer's supplies, showed Boyer a new product called Hot-Loc

grease, and fat from hot foods. The pads are constructed from a polymer skin capable of withstanding an extreme temperature range, according to Cryovac, and absorb liquids with patented "one-way" valves and a completely enclosed fluff-pulp matrix.

Boyer was intrigued by the technology. In the past he had lined the rotisserie chicken package bottoms with regular meat pads, which he says didn't absorb as much liquid. After a test of the new pads in one of his stores, he rolled them out chainwide.

Boyer found that the new pads weren't only more effective in absorbing liquids, they also enhanced the attractiveness of the product. "Our packaging for the rotisserie program is clear on top—with the 'Mrs. B's' logo we added for a personal touch—and has a black bottom," he says. "The pads come in both white and black, and when they're inside, they're barely visible."

Even more importantly, they work. Boyer's hasn't had a slip and fall due to grease since the Hot-Loc pilot two years ago. The retailer now also uses the pads with other precooked items for which grease may be an issue.

"Plus, when customers get it home, it's not sitting in a pool of grease," adds Boyer. "They don't have to worry about that when they eat half of it and put it back in the package. It's really served the purpose." ■



Cryovac's Hot-Loc Absorbent Pads soak up excess grease from Boyer's popular rotisserie chickens.

Absorbent Pads. Manufactured by Duncan, S.C.-based Cryovac Packaging Systems, the pads are designed to absorb excess juices such as water,