

their backroom operations.

Case-ready packaging increases the variety of cuts for the retailer, says Phil Ryan, General Manager for Case-Ready Products, Cryovac. "It enables stores to have products available 24 hours per day, 7 days per week and to replenish product quickly when demand surges."

By using case ready, retailers can create a custom product mix that meets the needs of individual stores.

Another factor driving case ready is food safety, says Mark Wilhelm, Tray Sealer Product Manager, Multivac. Retailers who cut meat in their stores' backrooms face sanitation and food-safety issues.

Wal-Mart weighs in

Wal-Mart is a big proponent of case-ready packaging. The largest grocer in the United States uses case-ready packaging exclusively for its fresh meat



Swift's "Perfect Bloom" package mimics the look of backroom products, but has a 21-day shelf life. The meat rests inside a black foam tray covered with a dual-layer film. The inner layer accepts printing and branding.

Cryovac—can hold whole-muscle cuts of fresh beef or pork. A low-oxygen atmosphere maintains a 21-day shelf life.

The meat rests inside a black foam tray covered with a dual-layer film. The inner layer accepts printing and branding. Retailers peel off the top airtight layer to expose the oxygen-permeable film. Since the packaging is pre-bloomed (the meat is always a red color), it can go straight to the display case.

After removal of the top layer, the meat has a three-day shelf life.

"The package looks like it came from the backroom," says Patrick Huebner, Swift's Vice President of R&D. "Retailers can 'peel 'em as they

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products in Supercenters and Neighborhood Markets.

Many retailers have followed Wal-Mart's lead. But others, in an effort to differentiate themselves, have kept their butchers in the backroom.

This backroom appearance is important. Hence, some case-ready packaging mimics the look of backroom products.

The "Perfect Bloom" package from Swift & Co., Greeley, Colo., is a case in point. The case-ready packaging—co-developed with

PACKAGE DESIGN SIGNALS AUTHENTIC HISPANIC CUISINE

Swift & Co. has launched an authentic line of cooked beef and pork entrees under the La Herencia brand. The line targets busy dual-income, Hispanic families that want to serve traditional meals, but don't have the four to eight hours of preparation time.

"Research shows that 79 percent of Hispanic families agree or strongly agree that speed and ease of preparation are among the most important considerations in deciding what foods to buy," says Ellen Gibson, Swift's Director of Corporate Marketing and Seasoned Products.

"The uniqueness of the La Herencia product line comes from its combination of authenticity and convenience," Gibson says.

To create true Hispanic cuisine, Swift enlisted the help of executive chefs from Mexico. The company also tested the products extensively with Mexican-American consumers.

The package design supports the positioning of the brand. The label carries deep colors of mahogany, black and gold to convey the richness and premium quality of the meat inside, says Patrick Huebner, Swift's Vice President of R&D.

The use of green in the La Herencia logo, in combination with the red in the Swift logo, hints at the colors of the flag of Mexico, Huebner adds.

A die-cut window in the label allows shoppers to see the color and texture of the meat. Most of the copy on the package is in Spanish.

The packaging delivers a 60-day refrigerated shelf life. It consists of a white tray, inner vacuum bag containing the meat and over-wrap film with a pressure-sensitive label. The

white tray communicates cleanliness, Huebner says.

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