

Food and Fun at the 2011 Winter Fancy Food Show in San Francisco

By Carol Blonder, Mon., Jan. 24 2011 @ 11:41AM

Twice a year, the National Association for the Specialty Food Trade (NASFT), a not-for-profit trade association, sponsors the **Fancy Food Show**, open only to the specialty food trade. This year's winter show, held January 16-18, at The Mascone Center in San Francisco, hosted **1300 exhibitors from 35 countries**.

As one would expect for a show featuring premium quality artisan and ethnic foodstuff produced by small manufacturers, **Italy led the list of countries represented with 135 exhibitors and California led the U.S. with 320 businesses on site**.

NASFT reported a **rebound in the \$63 billion specialty food industry in 2010**. Good news for the artisans, importers and entrepreneurs who manufacture and supply the specialty food niche for groceries, restaurants and specialty retail outlets. **Coffee, chocolate, cheese, olive oil, and cold beverages top the list for sales of specialty food products consumed by Americans**. Those categories are well represented at the show, along with a whole lot more for attendees to see and taste.

Buyers from retail and restaurant establishments, chefs and media types, go to the show to spot new trends, sample new products, and hear the stories behind established and emerging businesses. **A pair of supportive walking shoes and an empty stomach ready to sample hundreds of familiar and unusual food and beverage products are two essential requirements for show attendees**.

Spotting the hot trends is easy, choosing favorites more of a challenge while eating through two pavilions of culinary enticements. **Bacon hasn't diminished**; it continues to show up in candy (Das lolly) and snack (baconpop) categories. Watch out bacon, **chipotle seasoning is pushing ahead**; the chili heat is featured in everything from hot sauce to jerky.

Popped rice treats combined with nuts and dried fruits (180snacks), **truffle flavored popped corn (479 popcorn)**, and chips (Viva La Papa!) made from tubers other than potatoes, highlight the healthy snacking trend. Peanuts, another tuber touted as a super food, abound for use in flour and soups (Montebello Kitchen).

Consumer desire for sustainable **hand crafted condiments** shows up in pickles (Rick's Picks and McClure's Pickles) and ketchup (Sir Kensington).

Cheese is one of the most well represented categories in the show. The international booths along with American distributors display a huge array. **Artisan cow, sheep and goat cheese is growing in American production and consumption**. The variety of delectable goat cheeses (Willapa Hills), yogurt (Coach Farm) and caramels (Happygoat) would satiate *Wallace and Gromet*.