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PREMIUM TOPPINGS TAKE VEGGIES UP A CULINARY NOTCH

New Sargento Salad Finishers and Potato Finishers help at-home chefs make the most of popular produce

PLYMOUTH, Wis. (July 7, 2008) – Although it will never be absent from our kitchen tables, restaurant entrees and refrigerator drawers, the role of produce in the American diet has had its ups and downs – and right now, it’s trendier than ever.

Produce sales in the U.S. have grown nearly 20 percent over the past two years. And with lettuce and potatoes making up nearly 40 percent yearly vegetable sales, Sargento has chosen to respond by introducing *Salad Finishers* and *Potato Finishers* – chef-inspired blends of Sargento natural cheeses and other premium toppings. The move into the produce category is a first for Sargento, and one likely to be well received by at-home chefs eager for new flavors and meal ideas.

A number of culinary trends have contributed to the rise in produce popularity: Consumers are more likely to buy locally grown produce in an effort to go “back to basics,” entrée salads continue to hold their own as a popular main course – and more and more Americans are viewing vegetables as a meal core, as opposed to simply a side dish. In addition, the idea of customization is on the rise among cooks who enjoy testing the culinary waters.

“The consumer desire for customization was a key factor in the development of our Salad and Potato Finishers,” said Chip Schuman, Vice President of Marketing – Consumer Products Division (CPD). “Vegetables, especially lettuce and potatoes, provide the perfect blank slate for culinary enthusiasts to give their dishes a personal touch. We’re excited to provide quality ingredients to make that happen.”

Finishers combinations include complementary blends of Sargento natural cheeses, flame grilled marinated chicken, real smoked bacon crumbles and chef-inspired sauces. The conveniently packaged toppings come in a number of varieties that include:

Sargento Salad Finishers:

- *Cheddar Chicken* – Grilled chicken, Cheddar Cheese and seasoned croutons
- *Cheddar Bacon* – Bacon crumbles, Cheddar Cheese and ranch croutons

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- *Chicken Caesar* – Grilled chicken, Parmesan Cheese and Caesar croutons
- *Bistro Chicken* – Grilled chicken, Mozzarella with sun-dried tomato and basil, and toasted almonds
- *Cranberry Pecan* – Mozzarella and Asiago Cheese, dried cranberries and toasted pecans

Sargento Potato Finishers:

- *All American* – White Cheddar sauce with chives, Cheddar Cheese and bacon crumbles
- *Au Gratin* – Cheddar sauce, Monterey Jack Cheese and onion-seasoned breadcrumbs
- *Cheddar Broccoli* – Cheddar broccoli sauce, Monterey Jack Cheese and bacon crumbles

With individually packaged ingredients that allow for genuine customization, *Sargento Salad* and *Potato Finishers* are the ideal accompaniment to the produce trend – and the newest culinary accoutrement for at-home chefs everywhere.

Finishers are currently available in the produce section of grocery stores nationwide and are sold for the approximate retail price of \$2.99 to \$3.69.

Additional information may be obtained by contacting Rory Swikle at 312-755-6207 or via email at rswikle@wheatleytimmons.com.

Sargento Foods Inc. has demonstrated its passion for cheese and cheese-based solutions throughout its history. Founded in 1953 in Plymouth, Sargento is a leading manufacturer, packager and marketer of natural shredded, sliced and snack cheeses, cheese appetizers, ingredients and sauces. Sargento is owned and operated by the Gentine family, and has net sales of \$700 million.

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