

FOOD EXPORT ASSOCIATION OF THE MIDWEST USA AND FOOD EXPORT USA - NORTHEAST

U.S. Foodlink

Connecting Midwest and Northeast U.S. Food Suppliers with Worldwide Buyers



Three Trends Dominating American Freezers in 2026

Includes Featured
U.S. Suppliers and Products
Ready for Export

Frozen foods have ballooned into a \$93.5 billion annual category in the U.S. alone,

which represents the largest global market, according to “The Future of Frozen Food 2026” report by Conagra Brands. The frozen aisle is a popular destination for Americans, as it sits at the intersection of several priorities that often compete with one another: value, convenience, and health.

As food inflation continues to rise, many Americans are looking to rein in their spending in every category, including food and beverage. In a recent survey by the National Frozen & Refrigerated Foods Association (NFRA), 78% of respondents cited price as the biggest factor motivating their grocery purchasing decisions. The Survey also revealed that 73% of Americans agree that they can make affordable, tasty meals with items in their freezers.

U.S. consumers are especially gravitating toward frozen foods for the convenience they provide, with 38% of participants reportedly consuming frozen foods daily or every few days. Options for breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snacks have become increasingly plentiful, from single-serve meals to family-sized formats. The category has also seen a rise in frozen foods that are tailored to health and wellness goals, specialized diets,



Three Trends Dominating American Freezers in 2026 continued

food allergies, and other dietary constraints. With nearly 25% of consumers reporting that they're actively trying to consume fewer artificial additives and preservatives in a Circana survey, many are turning to frozen foods, as freezing food naturally preserves its flavor and freshness.



The following trends are expected to continue gaining traction, from entrées packed with protein and fiber to bite-sized snacks ideal for any occasion.

Graze-Worthy Snacks for Social Gatherings

In 2026, frozen products aren't just for quick weeknight dinners. They're increasingly being positioned as convenient options that are ideal for snacking, grazing, and social occasions. Mini meals, heat-and-eat snack plates, handhelds, shareable family packs, and multi-serve options are all on the rise, as U.S. consumers increasingly seek frozen products that can supply convenience in a bite-sized format.

Consumption of bite-sized snacks and appetizers has increased by 31% year over year, with annual sales totaling \$2.4 billion, according to data from Circana. However, the popularity of such items tends to vary greatly by generation, as younger demographics like Gen Z and Millennials are significantly more likely to purchase mini snacks than their older counterparts.

Savory options account for a large portion of this growth, increasing 36% year over year. Globally inspired flavors – particularly Asian-style bites such as mini wontons and mini egg rolls – are resonating strongly with younger consumers who are eager to explore bold, international tastes in convenient formats. In addition, restaurant-inspired frozen appetizers continue to perform well at retail, with heat-and-eat favorites like mozzarella sticks, loaded potato skins, jalapeño poppers, and boneless chicken bites frequently packaged in variety assortments designed for social occasions and at-home entertaining.

Products Designed for GLP-1 Users

Currently, about 23% of all U.S. households include at least one member who's taking a GLP-1 medication like Wegovy or Ozempic, according to Circana, and this figure is projected to increase to 35% by 2030. As adoption surges, GLP-1 users are increasingly seeking smaller portions and better-for-you products that are lower in sugar but rich in fiber and protein, and frozen foods are satisfying much of this demand. For instance, Nestlé launched a line of 14 portion-controlled frozen meals that are designed to meet the dietary needs of GLP-1 users under its Vital Pursuit brand, with options ranging from Cauliflower Crust Pepperoni Pizza to Air Fryer Meal Maple Balsamic Chicken.

In addition to consumers using GLP-1 medications, fiber remains a priority for Americans seeking to improve gut health. Fruit is a natural source of prebiotic fiber, prompting several companies to introduce pre-packaged smoothie blends that are frozen and ready to blend at home. Frozen superfruit packs, dragon fruit cubes, and ready-to-thaw smoothie bowls in tropical flavors have become increasingly common, offering convenient, nutrient-dense options for health-focused shoppers.

However, protein continues to lead in terms of desired nutrients. According to industry research, social conversations involving protein have climbed 21% over the past year, and frozen foods represent the leading grocery category for protein-rich options, accounting for approximately 14% of total frozen department dollar sales. High-protein frozen meals now commonly feature 25–30 grams of protein per serving, while plant-based offerings such as ready-to-steam edamame and other legumes provide substantial protein content in convenient formats.

Treats That Are Better for Consumers and the Planet

While consumers are generally more informed about health and wellness than past generations, they still want to indulge in dessert – and the more eco-friendly, the better. Island Way has responded to this demand with innovations like sorbet served in natural fruit shells that are made from hollowed-out rinds of tropical fruits like oranges and pineapples in lieu of standard product packaging.

On top of the environmental perks that these biodegradable fruit shells provide, they also reduce exposure to microplastics – a problem that's become so widespread, it is now impacting even the most isolated Pacific coastal waters. A recent study published in the PLOS One journal revealed that about one-third of the fish living near Pacific Island Countries and Territories are contaminated with microplastics, which pose serious risks to human health and the global ecosystem. Island Way sorbets are also made with non-GMO ingredients and without any preservatives, artificial flavors, and synthetic colorants, which are all major selling points for the health-conscious crowd.

Consumers are also continuing to seek frozen sweets that are lower in calories and sugar – especially GLP-1 users – as well as treats formulated with functional ingredients like collagen or adaptogens and allergen-free options like oat milk mochi.

The Future of Frozen

As food inflation persists and Americans show no signs of slowing down, demand for frozen meals and snacks will likely only continue to grow, positioning manufacturers and importers of such products for success in the years ahead – especially those that offer value, convenience, and health benefits that are clearly defined on packaging and in marketing materials.

Private Label Continues its Climb



The popularity of private-label brands (also known as “store brands”) continues to grow, and such products appear primed for further success in 2026.

In the span of just a few years, private label has undergone an evolution, shedding its negative “white label” connotation for a premium, value-driven option that can deliver on price, quality and, in many cases, taste.

Ipsos data from 2025 supports that assertion. For example, 74% of consumers agreed that private-label products are “just as good as brand-name products.” It’s also worth noting that 49% of respondents said they actively seek out private-label brand options when shopping.

The Private Label Manufacturers’ Association estimates that total store-brand revenue across all U.S. retail outlets approached \$280 billion in 2025 – marking a significant year for private label momentum. Some experts predict that private-label products will reach 23–25% in market share by 2030.

Increased Protein Consumption

At the sold-out Private Label Trade Show in Greater Chicago in late 2025, one of the primary trends on display was protein stacked with functional benefits. Exhibitors displayed products featuring collagen, fiber, creatine, and hyaluronic acid added for satiety, metabolic health, muscle retention, and performance recovery.

This shift aligns with rising GLP-1 usage, growing interest in nutrient-dense convenience, protein’s perceived role in vitality, and consumers’ unending search for healthier-for-you foods.

Gut Health

Gut health has moved further into the mainstream in recent months, driven by digestive wellness, metabolic health, and the rise of brands like Poppi and Olipop, which established soda as a functional beverage platform.

Digestive wellness now spans beverages, snacks, and pantry staples – a high-opportunity space for private label in 2026.

International Indulgence

One of the most noteworthy indulgence trends in recent months has been the rise of Dubai-style chocolate, inspired by the viral

pistachio-and-kadayif (also known as kadaifi and kataifi) bar dominating TikTok.

Retailers and manufacturers extended Dubai-style flavor cues (pistachio cream, chocolate, crispy kadaifi shredded phyllo dough) across ice cream, bakery, confections, and snacks –reinforcing its role as a scalable premium indulgence platform.

Ultra Savings and Premium Private Label Are Winning

Modern consumers have proven a willingness to pay a premium price for experiential, indulgent, functional, and/or artisanal products.

“Private-label brands offer ... flexibility (that) allows for faster trend cycles, more limited-edition product drops, and tighter alignment with consumer demand – all of which resonate with today’s discovery-driven shopper,” said Jaime Bettencourt, SVP of Global Account Management and Marketing at Mood Media.

Industry experts note that frozen and ready-to-eat categories have been especially fruitful for challenger product makers, because they boast a premium, high-quality product that can elevate an experience while also providing attractive unit economics. However, according to Innova Market Insights, when asked which criteria U.S. consumers use to assess the quality of food and beverages, price came out on top, with 57% of respondents citing it as a primary factor.

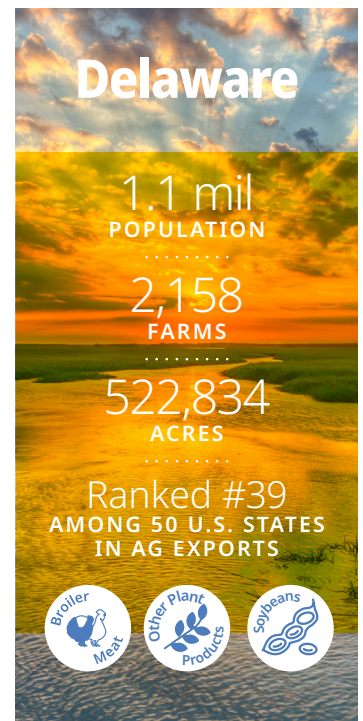
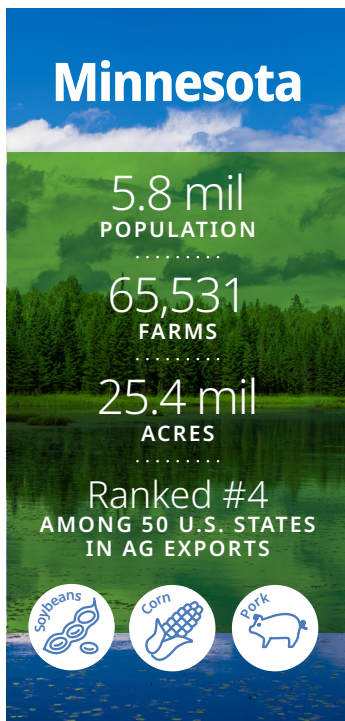
Thus, it appears both ultra-savings offerings and premium products have an opening in today’s market to further connect with consumers across income levels with authenticity and transparency.

Shoppers Are Redefining Private-Label Quality

Gen X and Baby Boomers drive most shifts in private label, but focusing on young consumers like Gen Z and Millennials is undoubtedly key for long-term growth. Trends reveal that younger consumers are increasing private-label purchases in the U.S., due to their frequent snacking, Innova Market Insights noted.

Innova Market Insights sees potential for growth in the private-label category for brands offering snackable, fresh-prepared, and impulse-driven products, such as grab-and-go snacks, in addition to bakery items.

Featured U.S. Midwest & Northeast State Profiles



High-income shoppers are finally tightening their belts in 2026, signaling a U.S. economy where everyone feels the squeeze. Experts say the downturn may linger, but consumers still splurge selectively – rewarding brands that double down on quality.

Gen Z is reshaping dining trends, sharply tilting toward high protein meals, clean ingredients, and functional beverages. The top most-requested F&B items on college campuses include Pho and ramen, authentic Mexican cuisine, sushi, pastas and mac & cheese, and Sweet treats.



Americans are increasingly “cooking for joy,” according to a survey conducted by Challenge Butter. Nearly two-thirds of Americans said they either want to eat better without restriction this year or aren’t changing how they eat at all. Nearly half indicated that eating foods often considered “bad” nevertheless reduces their stress.

As the number of GLP-1 users grows, they’re looking for more personalized, nutrient-dense F&B options to support their needs. Because GLP-1 journeys vary widely, companies that tailor products to different user segments – and provide companion or maintenance offerings – will be best positioned in this emerging market, reported IFT.



Upscale grocers are thriving by selling “affordable luxuries” to affluent and younger consumers who treat premium food as identity and experience.

Yelp searches for ‘swavory’ flavor mashups are surging as butter dipped soft serve and miso caramel pairings go viral. Stew Leonard’s unexpected hit shows how simple, low cost twists can boost traffic, brand awareness, and innovation.



Spicy foods are surging as global flavors, TikTok trends, and “swicy” mashups reshape consumer expectations.

With demand rising for heat that adds character, brands are racing to innovate with new menu items.

Consumers are increasingly seeking functional ingredients beyond protein like colostrum, collagen, sea moss, lion’s mane, and ashwagandha. Energy, mood, and mental wellbeing are top of mind for consumers in 2026, especially younger ones, reported *Food Dive*.

‘Canna curiosity’ is on the rise, with consumer interest in hemp derived THC drinks growing despite a sweeping federal ban on the horizon. Brands and retailers are navigating a high stakes regulatory shakeup that could upend a fast growing category and thousands of jobs.



Baby Boomers are a food industry powerhouse, controlling unmatched wealth and displaying stronger loyalty than younger cohorts. Experts say brands that overlook older adults’ appetite for quality and hybrid convenience risk leaving serious money on the table.

New research reveals that 40% of diners are willing to pay more for protein-rich menu items. The survey by Revenue Management Solutions also found that 58% of diners are likely to order from a “protein-rich” menu section, reported *Restaurant Business*.



FOOD EXPORT-MIDWEST & FOOD EXPORT-NORTHEAST STAFF

Brendan Wilson
Chief Executive Officer/Executive Director

Michelle Rogowski
Chief Operating Officer/Deputy Director

Teresa Miller
Chief Program & Partnership Officer

Food Export Association of the Midwest (Food Export-Midwest)
29 North Wacker Drive, Suite 1000
Chicago, IL 60606
312.334.9200

Food Export USA-Northeast (Food Export-Northeast)
One Penn Center, 1617 JFK Blvd., Suite 420
Philadelphia, PA 19103 USA
215.829.9111

www.foodexport.org
Comments, Questions,
email: info@foodexport.org


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Use Food Export's Branded Program for Import-Compliant Packaging

Packaging and labeling regulations are critical considerations when exporting U.S. products. However, meeting foreign market requirements can involve significant costs for design, translation, compliance review, and production adjustments.

By partnering with your U.S. supplier through Food Export's Branded Program, you can help ensure products meet your market's import requirements—while reducing the financial burden.

Why This Matters to You as an Importer

Partnering with a Branded Program participant allows you to:

- ✓ Reduce financial risk when launching new U.S. products
- ✓ Improve speed to market with compliant packaging
- ✓ Strengthen collaboration with your U.S. supplier
- ✓ Increase promotional investment without increasing your cost burden
- ✓ Differentiate your portfolio with properly localized, market-ready products

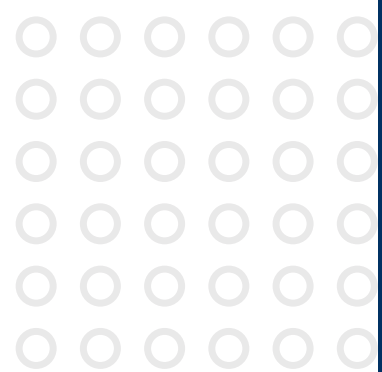
When your supplier receives reimbursement support, both of you can invest more confidently in packaging, labeling, and marketing execution.

This cost-share structure makes it easier for both you and your U.S. supplier to develop compliant, market-ready packaging.

The program reimburses 50% of eligible expenses. For example, if \$10,000 is spent on import-compliant packaging updates, your U.S. supplier may receive \$5,000 in reimbursement, reducing overall launch costs and making market adaptation more feasible.

The Branded Program reimburses **50% of eligible promotional expenses**, including costs associated with import-compliant packaging and labeling such as:

- Translation services
- Graphic design
- Compliance review
- Printing plates
- Packaging printing
- Labor costs for stickering



How the Partnership Works

- Your U.S. supplier must apply and be approved for the Branded Program through Food Export.
- Together, you develop a marketing and packaging plan tailored to your market's requirements.
- The supplier may choose to pass along these savings to you either through a wire transfer or as a credit on a future purchase order.

* Eligible products must contain at least 50% U.S. agricultural content and clearly display a U.S. origin statement (e.g., "Product of U.S.A.").

* You will provide documentation of packaging and labeling expenses to your U.S. supplier so they can submit required reimbursement paperwork.

Examples of Import-Compliant Packaging Supported by the Branded Program



Packaging redesigned to meet Canadian import labeling requirements.



Wine labels updated to comply with Japanese regulations.



Animal feed supplement packaging modified for Egyptian import standards.



Label application added to meet UK import requirements.

Partner with your U.S. supplier and Food Export to ensure products meet your market's regulatory standards—while maximizing your marketing investment.

Visit Food Export's website to learn more about importing Food and Agriculture Products from the U.S.: <https://www.foodexport.org/import-from-the-us/>



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info@foodexport.org



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Date Lady, Inc.

SPRINGFIELD, MISSOURI

Our signature Date Syrup is made with just one ingredient: organic dates, bringing you rich, caramel-like sweetness straight from the fruit of the date palm. No refined sugar, no additives, no shortcuts. Just a pure, nutrient-rich alternative that fits beautifully into your favorite recipes from morning smoothies to late-night drizzles over ice cream.

Founded by Colleen Sundlie and inspired by her family's time in the Middle East, Date Lady exists to make real, wholesome sweetness accessible to every kitchen. Our best-selling products, including date syrup, date sugar, and date paste, are all about clean ingredients, rich flavor, and that melt-in-your-mouth magic only dates can bring.

We proudly craft products we use in our own homes, with our own families in mind.



Eastern Fisheries, Inc.

NEW BEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS

Eastern Fisheries, founded in 1978, is a family owned and operated, vertically integrated global seafood supplier and the world's largest scallop supplier. With operations in the U.S. and China and strategic partnerships with the world's richest supply sources, Eastern Fisheries is uniquely positioned to bring premium quality seafood to the global marketplace.

Eastern Fisheries' All Natural, Alaskan Flounder is wild caught from the icy, cold waters of the North Pacific. The fish is cut and frozen right at sea to seal in flavor and freshness. Alaskan Flounder has a mild flavor with a flaky texture lending itself to a variety of cooking applications and recipes. Flounder is available year round and offered in a variety of fillet sizes. Bulk and Private Label custom pack types available.

Frozen-At-Sea | MSC and BRC Food Certified | All Natural | Wild Caught



Fire Department Coffee

ROCKFORD, ILLINOIS

Fire Department Coffee is more than just a veteran- and firefighter-owned coffee company. We're a community united by a shared passion for great coffee and a mission to support sick and injured firefighters and the communities they serve.

We take pride in delivering a selection of premium roasts, including our proprietary Spirit Infused Coffee since 2016. Find your next roast on our website and join us in supporting our fellow firefighters. <https://www.firedeptcoffee.com/>



GivePet

LEAWOOD, KANSAS

GivePet is a super-premium dog and cat treat company based in Overland Park, KS. Founded in 2016, GivePet gives back to local rescues and shelters with every purchase. For every bag purchased, GivePet provides enough treats for at least 10 shelter dogs. GivePet has distribution partnerships distributors across the United States, Canada, Mexico and the Caribbean. The treats are primarily sold in independent specialty retail locations. GivePet is very proud to give back to local rescues. GivePet also prides itself on superior nutrition. The treats are made in the USA with all whole foods, heart healthy ingredients and minimal processing. GivePet is known for its award-winning packaging and fun special occasion treats. <https://www.givepet.com>

For more information about these or other Featured Products please email: FoodLink@foodexport.org.

featured PRODUCTS



Food
Export
Midwest USA



Gurley's Foods

WILLMAR, MINNESOTA

Family owned and operated since 1953, Gurley's Foods custom roasts and packages nuts, snack mixes and trail mixes in Willmar, Minnesota. Our brand name is Gurley's Golden Recipe because our "recipe" for great tasting nuts uses a combination of family secrets to create the very best in roasted nuts available. We roast each nut variety in small batches to ensure an even roast throughout. Our in-shell peanuts are still tumble-roasted over an open flame. Another key difference is we only buy nuts grown on family farms located in the U.S. (except cashews and Brazil nuts which need a rainforest to grow). Our packaging, cardboard and all supplies are locally sourced. We also pack many varieties of candy in our popular Gurley's Profit Advantage Line (PAL) which has no pre-price on the bag. All products can be ordered in combination to achieve an economical delivered cost. gurleysfoods.com



Missouri Northern Pecan Growers

NEVADA, MISSOURI

We are a farmer owned company located in the Midwest, USA. Our company was formed in 2000 by several local pecan farmers and today we have over 50 area farmers. We specialize in the native pecans which have a much higher oil content and superior flavor and are smaller in size as compared to southern hybrid varieties. Our pecans are 100% grown and processed in the USA. Our processing facility is HACCP certified, FDA compliant and 3rd party audited. Our product offerings include certified Organic and non-Organic Pecans, Pecan Oil and Pecan Meal-Flour. We take pride in producing sustainable, single ingredient, heart-healthy products that contain zero additives, preservatives or genetically modified derivatives.

We have experience in exporting to the EU, Canada, UAE, and Asian markets and can issue compliance documents on short notice. We can deliver directly to your warehouse or the freight port of your choice. Contact us by calling (1) 417-667-3501, (toll-free) 1-866-732-2678 or by emailing marketing@mopekans.com. You can also see our product line at www.mopekans.com.

Certified Organic | Gluten Free | Non-GMO | Kosher | Vegan friendly | Heart-Healthy | Keto, Paleo and Whole30 compliant | No preservatives or artificial ingredients



Luke's Lobster

SACO, MAINE

Our Shrimp Scampi with Gemelli Pasta combines tender, antibiotic and hormone-free shrimp with a rich, savory sauce made from extra virgin olive oil, real butter, fresh garlic, shallots, onions, and a bright splash of real lemon juice. Twirls of gemelli pasta soak up every drop of flavor for a restaurant-quality dish you can enjoy at home in minutes.

Luke's Lobster was founded by third generation lobsterman Luke Holden in 2009 and has since grown to 25+ family-owned and operated restaurants around the US. A vertically integrated company and Certified B Corporation, Luke's launched a line of grocery products in 2018, with the promise that every product we create meets the same fresh, best-in-class, restaurant-quality standards we serve in our shacks.



MNR Holdings LLC

MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN

MNR Holdings LLC is the home of Kidz Confections, a collection of playful candy brands recognized worldwide. With customers across the United States, South America, Canada, Japan, and Europe, the company offers both branded and private-label packaging solutions – bringing fun, novelty, and flexibility to candy aisles around the globe.

One standout product, Gone Bananas® gum, features banana-flavored gum packaged in a one-of-a-kind collectible container. The product is kosher, gluten-free, handmade, and BIPOC-owned, with a shelf life of up to two years and nine months, making it an eye-catching and reliable option for international retail markets.

For more information about these or other Featured Products please email: FoodLink@foodexport.org.



Pureluxe Inc.

PITTSBURG, KANSAS

Pureluxe Pet Food is an award-winning, innovative brand redefining pet nutrition. We prioritize transparency, giving you complete control over what you feed your furry companions. Our all-natural ingredients are carefully selected to provide elite nutrition that supports active lifestyles, while also offering great taste – even for picky eaters. Free from artificial additives and by-products, Pureluxe promotes healthy digestion, a shiny coat, and sustained energy. What sets us apart? Our exclusive app, under the name PurePROOF, lets you see the exact nutrition in every bag before you make a purchase – no more guesswork in the pet store. This level of transparency is unique to Pureluxe, as no other brand offers this kind of insight into their products. With Pureluxe, you can rest easy knowing you're giving your pet the best. Because they deserve the luxury of healthy, wholesome food.

www.pureluxepetfood.com | social media channels @pureluxepetfood
contact is info@pureluxepetfood.com or personally jdavis@pureluxepetfood.com



Stengel Oils

MILBANK, SOUTH DAKOTA

Omega 3 fatty acids are one of the most talked about nutrients in wellness today – and Cal's Flax Oil, crafted by Stengel Oils, delivers them in exceptional purity and concentration. As modern diets tilt heavily toward Omega 6 fats, many people look for simple, effective ways to restore balance. Cal's Flax Oil offers a powerful plant based solution.

These essential Omega 3s support the health of cells throughout the body, yet the human system can't produce them on its own. That's why adding Cal's Flax Oil to meals is such an easy upgrade. Its smooth, clean flavor blends effortlessly into foods while supplying the essential fats your body needs.

People choose Cal's Flax Oil as part of a lifestyle focused on heart health, healthy cholesterol levels, and overall vitality. With every serving, you're giving your body a high quality source of essential nutrition – naturally, simply, and deliciously.

<https://stengel oils.com/>



Terranean

CLEVELAND, OHIO

Terranean is a women-owned, family-founded snack brand focused exclusively on premium, seed-oil-free pita chips rooted in authentic Middle Eastern tradition. Founded by Lebanese-American entrepreneur Tina Chamoun, Terranean's pita chips are twice-baked, not fried, using real, authentic, double-layered pita bread for a light, crunchy texture. The chips are vegan, Non-GMO Project Verified, Kosher Pareve Pas Yisroel certified, and Halal certified, with no added sugar and no artificial preservatives, colors, or dyes. Flavor offerings include Za'atar made with real za'atar herb, Spicy Za'atar, Hand-Harvested Sea Salt, and Cinnamon Sugar made with date sugar, maple sugar, and just one gram of cane sugar. Designed for today's health-conscious consumer, Terranean's resealable packaging supports freshness and portability, making the chips ideal for on-the-go snacking and versatile enough to pair with dips, salads, soups, and sandwiches. Beyond food, Terranean is community-driven, supporting women, immigrants, and ethical sourcing in the Levant while employing an all-women, immigrant team in Cleveland, Ohio.

TerraneanHerbs.com | @TerraneanHerbs | Info@TerraneanHerbs.com



Wigglesworth International

PISCATAWAY, NEW JERSEY

Wigglesworth International connects global buyers to the reliability of American agriculture with precision and transparency. We specialize in sourcing, verifying, and exporting high-quality U.S. grains, nuts, and dried fruits for international markets. As your dedicated U.S. presence, we manage every step of the export process – from supplier validation and quality checks to documentation, logistics coordination, and shipment monitoring.

Our customers gain access to trusted American producers and a streamlined, data-driven export experience supported by the Wigglesworth Gateway, our secure portal offering real-time visibility into shipments and records. Whether you require bulk commodities or specialty varieties, we ensure clarity, consistency, and confidence in every transaction.

For buyers seeking dependable sourcing and a transparent export partner, Wigglesworth International delivers a service built on integrity, accuracy, and operational excellence.

www.wigglesworthgrains.com | Email: sales@wigglesworthgrains.com

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