

## 2008 Readers' Choice Awards: The food industry's best suppliers

By Dave Fusaro, Editor in Chief  
FoodProcessing.com

Here are the top suppliers in 41 categories of ingredients, equipment and services.



This guy wants it all: "I rate my suppliers on the basis of supporting our company [helping it] to grow successfully by not compromising on quality, on-time performance, technical support and meeting total lowest cost requirements."

But who doesn't want it all? These are tough economic times, with consumer buying power down and ingredient costs up. So food processors have to rely on nothing short of excellence from their suppliers – as does the above manager at a supplier of baking mixes.

The expectations are no lower on the equipment-buying side of the food industry. "The top-tier suppliers do the following: 1. listen; 2. understand our processes and constraints; 3. actively engage in plant audits; 4. brainstorm options; 5. accurately estimate capital, material and labor impact; 6. show creativity in implementation schemes; and 7. truly partner with the processor on innovation and development." That's according to a plant executive at a meat and poultry company.

So it was against a tougher than usual economic backdrop that we took this year's Readers' Choice Awards survey. In December and January, we sent e-mail surveys to a subset of our circulation list. We got 234 responses back in this, our sixth annual effort.

No supplier names were suggested; the form is an unaided recall survey. Recipients represent all categories of the food and beverage industry. There are two separate surveys: one for subscribers primarily involved in specifying processing and packaging equipment and a separate one for those buying ingredients and flavors. The winners in 10 categories of wellness ingredients will be named in the April issue of our sister magazine *Wellness Foods*.

Despite the tough times, the comments were no more negative than usual. In both the equipment and the ingredient responses, positive comments outnumbered the negative ones by about five to one, which has been traditional with these surveys.

"[An ingredient supplier] does a wonderful job of providing quality ingredients on time," writes one ingredient buyer. "We are never shorted. If they ever have a problem, customer service notifies us to work out alternative arrangements."

"We get great customer service," says an equipment buyer. His suppliers are "very conscientious about quality."

"I have found that [an ingredient vendor] has been an outstanding supplier who will meet a price point you need as well as being a quick response supplier. They're also willing to keep inventories on hand to help their customers out," writes a Midwestern dairy foods processor.

Of course, not everyone is thrilled. "Some flavor companies have killer minimums, so we have found alternative suppliers who offer excellent service also," comments an Eastern maker of sauces and condiments. She singled out one ingredient company with "poor customer service [that] nearly cost us a production run at a co-packer."

"Customer service has decreased overall. Customer service representatives are rude and easily offended," says an East Coast snack food manufacturer. "We often face disappointment," writes another.

"There is one equipment and service provider that will make you wait three to four weeks for their service to come because they are understaffed. When we ask for ASAP service, we pay an arm and a leg due to the travel tab, hotel, etc. Ridiculous!"

"Many companies are resting on their laurels with the preferred supplier program," writes another. "You don't hear see the sales reps as much as you should, because they know you have to call them when you need an ingredient."

Several respondents lament that "those in 'Customer Service' forget what their job title is. Some have the attitude that they're doing you a big favor by answering the phone."

There also were numerous interesting observations about changes in the business.

"Ingredient suppliers are getting more involved in R&D," says a Latin American food processor, who reads our digital edition.

This guy at a ConAgra subsidiary has an interesting take on how to spot a quality ingredient supplier: "I can usually tell if I will be getting good service and quality products if I can easily obtain up-to-date kosher and organic certification. Companies that stay on top of these certifications usually have very good quality programs."

"I think information is almost as important as the product in today's world," writes a product developer at a salad dressing firm. "Those companies that have the systems in place to rapidly provide the necessary info are more valued." Adds another ingredient buyer: "The more complicated the use of the ingredient, the more critical technical support is to the relationship."

Maybe it all comes down to service. "The one thing that makes us come back to a company is when they service what they sell so we get maximum good from it."

So, we honor the companies you've honored. While we strive to award first-, second- and third-place honors in each category, we think a winner must garner at least 5 percent of the vote, so some categories are a little thinner than others. Our thanks to the readers who took the time to vote and our congratulations to these 94 superior suppliers to the food industry.

## 2008 Readers' Choice Award Winners

### Ingredients:

*\*Differences of 2% or less are a statistical tie*

#### Beverage flavors

1. Givaudan 13%
2. Firmenich 5%  
Flavors of North America/FONA 5%  
Robertet 5%  
Wild Flavors 5%

#### Cheese & cheese ingredients

1. Kraft Food Ingredients 24%
2. Sargento 11%
3. Kerry 7%

#### Chocolate/cocoa

1. ADM 24%
2. Barry Callebaut 20%
3. Blommer 8%  
Cargill 8%

#### Colorants

1. Sensient 24%
2. D.D. Williamson 7%  
Chr. Hansen 7%  
Sethness 7%

#### Dairy flavors & ingredients

1. Edlong Dairy Flavors 13%  
Kerry 13%
3. Butter Buds 7%

#### Emulsifiers

1. Danisco 21%
2. Caravan 9%

#### Enzymes

1. Danisco 13%  
Novozymes 13%

#### Fats & oils

1. Cargill 21%  
\*Bunge 20%
3. ADM 7%  
Loders Croklaan 7%

#### Fruits/dried fruits

1. Van Drunen Farms 11%  
\*Dole 9%

#### Grain products

1. ConAgra 18%
2. Cargill 11%
3. ADM 5%

#### Gums & hydrocolloids

1. TIC Gums 36%
2. CP Kelco 11%
3. FMC 8%

#### Nuts

1. Diamond Foods 12%
2. Blue Diamond Growers 6%

#### Salt

1. Morton 41%
2. Cargill 22%

#### Savory flavors

1. McCormick 8%

#### Stabilizers

1. Danisco 15%  
TIC Gums 15%

#### Starches

1. National Starch 53%
2. Tate & Lyle 9%
3. Cargill 6%

#### Sugar

1. Domino 39%
2. Imperial 9%  
\*United Sugars 7%

#### Sweeteners (not sugar)

1. Tate & Lyle 24%
2. Cargill 16%

#### Sweet flavors

1. Bell Flavors 10%  
\*Givaudan 8%  
\*IFF 8%

#### Vanilla

1. Virginia Dare 16%
2. David Michael 6%

#### Vegetables/dried vegetables

1. Van Drunen Farms 18%

## 2008 Readers' Choice Award Winners

### Equipment & Services

*\*Differences of 2% or less are a statistical tie*

#### Control systems

1. Rockwell Automation 43%

#### Conveying equipment

1. Azo 8%

#### Dryers & ovens

1. Heat and Control 11%
- \*Aeroglide 9%

#### Extrusion

1. Coperion Werner & Pfleiderer 12%
- \*Wenger 10%

#### Flooring

1. Stonhard 35%

#### Flow measurement

1. Emerson Process Management 16%

#### Form/fill/seal equipment

1. Bosch 16%

#### Heat transfer equipment

1. APV 29%

#### Lubricants

1. Chevron 15%
  2. Jax 11%
- Lubriplate 11%
- Shell 11%

#### Metal detection/X-ray/inspection

1. Mettler Toledo 35%
  2. Fortress 12%
- Loma 12%

#### Mixing & blending

1. SPX 18%
  2. Breddo Likwifier 14%
- \*Admix 12%

#### Motors & drives

1. Baldor 45%

#### Packaging machinery

1. Multivac 9%
  2. Cryovac div. Sealed Air 6%
- Bosch 6%

#### Packaging materials

1. Cryovac div. Sealed Air 14%

#### Pest management

1. Copesan 34%
2. Ecolab 19%
3. Orkin 5%

#### Pumps

1. SPX 17%
2. Goulds 13%

#### Refrigeration & freezing

1. FMC FoodTech 16%
- Johnson Controls 16%

#### Size reduction

1. Urschel Laboratories 30%

#### Uniform services

1. Aramark 36%
2. Cintas 29%
3. G&K 11%

#### Weighing/checkweighing

1. Mettler Toledo 23%
2. Ishida 16%