

Creative thinking and cutting-edge equipment design will be on display at the special Kitchen Innovations area of the NRA show in May. Here's what to look for. **BY JOHN LAWN**



# Kitchen Innovations

## *A Showcase for Out-of-the-Box Thinking*

**BUILD A BETTER MOUSETRAP**, as the proverb says, and the world will beat a path to your door. The same can be said of kitchen equipment, although it is often a challenge to know exactly how "new and improved" the latest products really are.

The Kitchen Innovations program sponsored by the NRA has helped in that regard for the past seven years. It relies on an independent panel of expert judges (see p. 54) who review nominated products introduced over the last 24 months, selecting those it feels have the potential to be game changers in the lives of show-going operators.

The goal is to look beyond simple product improvements or enhancements to identify innovations that provide solutions to problems that haven't been addressed previously, or ones that have been addressed only in imperfect ways.

This year's 21 award recipients span a wide range of applications, from a device that converts used cooking oil into biodiesel fuel to an ice-sanitizing machine. Some are from the industry's largest players, others from upstarts looking to develop the proverbial better mousetrap. Here's a look at what you'll find at NRA Booth 2440.





**COMBITHERM AUTOMATIC GREASE COLLECTION SYSTEM** collects grease generated by combi ovens at the source and keeps it out of plumbing and sewage systems. Developed by **Alto-Shaam, Inc.**, it uses a patented system to safely separate oil and water, automatically flushing water down the drain and diverting the grease to sealed containers for easy disposal.

**OPTIMAX COMPACT BATTER-BREADING MACHINE** packs a high capacity, automatic breading machine into an efficient tabletop footprint. Designed by **Bettcher Industries, Inc.**, it provides consistency, reduces waste and "can be integrated right into a snack line," observes Jim Krueger, Jr., one of the judges. "It could operate right in front of the customer."

**SIN-ACQUA WATERLESS FOOD-HOLDING SYSTEM** replaces the steam table for holding product at a controlled temperature. Made by **Cook Tek Induction Systems, LLC**, it eliminates the need for plumbing and maintenance associated with drains. With LED lighting and infrared top heating, "It could be good in catering and special event applications where holding temperatures are critical and traditional steam tables

aren't feasible," says Dan Bendall, another judge.

**ACTIVEVIEW HEALTH DEPARTMENT INTELLIGENCE** is a proprietary software application geared to multi-unit operations that need to standardize and compare health inspection data across operations. Created by **Ecolab, Inc.**, it offers a powerful reporting tool that allows a foodservice operation to take centralized sanitation data and turn it into actionable strategy.

**STEALTH FLY STATION**, also from **Ecolab, Inc.**, is a great example of that "better mousetrap" thinking. A black, hanging wall panel, it requires no power and is amazingly effective at attracting and killing flies both indoors and outdoors. "It might be especially useful in field operations or facilities with a lot of in and out traffic, loading dock areas," says Krueger.

**ICE MACHINE SANITIZING DEVICE** is a compact ozone generator that treats water before it's made into ice, safely and continuously sanitizing ice machines, holding bins and lines. Developed by **Franke Foodservice Systems, Inc.**, it attaches to the incoming water line and is said to kill 99.99 percent of common microorganisms. "Anyone who is concerned about food safety and has an ice machine should look at this," says judge Bill Eaton.

**FRESH COOKING OIL BOX SYSTEM** by **Frontline International** offers an automated way to dispense cooking oil for refilling fryers. Rather than typical horizontal dispensing, it uses an inverted design and pump system to improve yield by up to 10 percent. "It's a simple idea, but is a real innovation," says judge Aaron LaMotte.

**LARGE VAT FRYERS** from **Frymaster** offer significantly reduced



Self Cooking Centers by Rationale

oil and energy consumption while accommodating high volume (three basket) production with a reduced footprint. "Anyone in the kitchen will remind you that space under a hood is

at a premium," says LaMotte. "When you can replace a piece of equipment and free up that space, it is very significant."

**INDUCTION GRIDDLE** by **Garland** is not your mother's induction cooktop! It offers fast start-up, reduced energy use and greater cooking consistency with a specially-engineered, three-layer surface that provides precisely-controlled heat and uses temperature sensors to instantly compensate for differences in heat absorption by product. "It takes a different approach to address the problem of spot-to-spot heat differentials," says Eaton.

**OMNIFLEX DISPENSE-and-VAC SYSTEM** is a combination mop-bucket/wet-dry vacuum system that automatically controls the dispensing, application and removal of cleaning fluid to floors. Developed by **Kaivac**, it controls chemical and supply use and "makes effective floor cleaning and degreasing easy for even relatively untrained workers," says Bendall. "Floors are left dry immediately."

**BOLT ON KITCHENS**, amazingly, are just what the name suggests. Designed by **Kitchens to Go (Carlin Mfg)**, they make it possible to buy a pre-fabricated kitchen addition custom-engineered to match the structural facing it will "bolt" to, creating a permanent addition to the existing structure. "It allows operations to add a lower-cost, code-compliant space that goes up quickly and matches the architectural environment," says judge Kathleen Seelye. "It also could provide a way to add prep or refrigerated storage space or expand a servery."

**ON-DEMAND BURNERS** from **Lang Mfg.** provide a gas-fired countertop range that automatically fire up and turn off, activated by the weight of the cook pan, potentially saving thousands of dollars a year in energy costs. Never worry again that the chef just leaves the burners on for convenience.

**PLANAR PLUME TECHNOLOGY** employs a re-engineered approach to hot air impingement in rapid cook ovens, an approach developed by **MerryChef USA**. "The design addresses the fact that fast cook ovens provide better heat transfer near the top and less so at the bottom," says LaMotte. "It cooks at a higher efficiency by transferring heat more evenly throughout the oven."

**SILENT ALERT** by **Power Soak Systems** uses silent, projected color-coded light to alert kitchen staff that specific actions need to be taken, without the disruptive, side effects of audio alert systems.



Fresh Cooking Oil Box System by Frontline



Spin Zester by ZipZester



**SELF-COOKING CENTER** by *Rationale* employs HiDensityControl and Efficient LevelControl to let chefs maximize output from a combi oven, loading more food into the cabinet and cutting production time. Its Whitefficiency feature automatically adjusts to individual patterns of use.

**VISION-ENABLED TRAINING** aids employee sanitation training and risk management. Developed by *Sealed Air*, it employs small web cameras and algorithm-based software to monitor such practices as handwashing and the use of gloves and hair restraints. It time-stamps photos and allows managers to observe exceptions to approved practices and to identify and reward top-performing employees.

**THE BIO PRO EX** turns used cooking oil into premium-grade biodiesel fuel for about 95¢/gallon and can produce 50-100 gallons in 24 hours. The output can be blended with regular diesel, but itself burns up to 90 percent cleaner. Developed by *Springboard Biodiesel, LLC*, these units "could be very attractive to large college campuses and others who use diesel for grounds crew vehicles and other applications," says Seelye.

**AUTOMATIC MIX'N MACHINE** by *Vitamix* is a programmable mixer that can incorporate candies, syrups, cookies and other hard-to-mix ingredients into soft serve products without overblending the solid ingredients. "It could make possible signature products in the retail environment," observes LaMotte.

## The Kitchen Innovations Expert Jury

The jury for NRA's Kitchen Innovations program is comprised of nine experts from throughout foodservice operations and consulting sectors. They include:

**Dan Bendall**  
Principal  
Food Strategy Inc.

**Martin Cowley**  
Sr. Mgr. Design & Standards  
Walt Disney Parks and Resorts

**William Eaton, FFCSI**  
Chairman  
Cini-Little International

**Robert Forrester**  
Principal  
Restaurant Industry Solutions

**Foster Frable, Jr., FCSI**  
Founding Partner  
Clevenger Frable LaVallee

**Jim Krueger, Jr.**  
Chief, F&B Research and Development  
Air Force Services

**Aaron LaMotte**  
Director  
Sodexo Performance Interiors

**Robert Marshall**  
Vice President, U.S. Operations  
McDonald's Corporation

**Kathleen H. Seelye, FFCSI, LEED**  
Managing Partner  
Ricca Newmark Design

**VTEC INFRARED CHARBROILER** uses proprietary technology and a conversion burner developed by *Vulcan* to offer an instant-on, instant-off cooking platform that uses 50 percent less gas than similar-sized units, while reducing the danger of flare-ups. Many operations are said to achieve paybacks in less than two years.

**WATER-SAVING HEATED DISHER WELL** by *Wells Manufacturing* holds food serving utensils at bacteria and allergen-free temperatures while conserving up to 18 gallons of water/hour.

**SPIN ZESTER** uses patent-pending blade designs and tension mechanisms to produce the highest quality zest safely, and in seconds. Made by *ZipZester, LLC* from industrial glass-filled nylon and high grade stainless steel, it's a natural for bar operators but is also "a marvelous implement that might work at a hydration or juice bar to let operators provide value-added customization to "healthy" drinks," says Eaton. **FM**



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