

# Adaptability Via A Quest For A Vibrating Cow

By Krystal Gabert, Associate Editor, [Food Manufacturing \(FM\)](#) [1]

Walking through the Worldwide Food Expo several weeks ago, I was struck most by the adaptability of the suppliers with whom I spoke. During what is an indisputably difficult time for manufacturing in particular and business in general, companies have had to tweak their products or shift focus in order to stay competitive.

In fact, time after time, I heard the same story—equipment suppliers told me that in seeking to re-imagine their roles in a challenging market, they solicited feedback directly from their customers, asking exactly which kinds of products could help the bottom line.

After two days of these conversations, I was sitting in my hotel room reviewing the panels and events happening at the show the next morning. One entitled "Feeding an Aging Population" caught my eye. The intention of the session was to address the increasing number of seniors in the U.S. and the effects that this growing segment of the population may have on the food industry—such as an increased need for easy-to-open packaging, low-sodium foods and pre-packaged foods in smaller portion sizes.

This struck me as interesting because:

- I have a *Freakonomics*-like interest in unexpected cause and effect.
- Though necessary modifications to food products are completely unsurprising effects of a demographics shift, I can honestly say the issue never crossed my mind until it was spelled out for me. And yet, for food manufacturers who are proactive about addressing the concerns of seniors, such modifications will undoubtedly provide increased profits.

On the first day of the Worldwide Food Expo, Food Manufacturing editor-in-chief Karen Langhauser scored what is perhaps the most awesomely random piece of trade show swag ever: a miniature foam cow that vibrates with the pull of a string. By the next day, FM sales rep Andrea Heffner and I had decided that we must too become proud owners of vibrating foam cows.

And we spent the better half of the afternoon seeking them out. During the quest, we were able to speak with dozens of people who were presenting hundreds of great, innovative products. I collected tons of useful information from food manufacturers and equipment manufacturers alike. And though we never found the cows, the afternoon was extremely productive.

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And I think that's the challenge: It's obviously great to have a vision for where you're going, what you're manufacturing or which kind of vibrating farm animal you're seeking. A sharp focus and understanding of your company's products and market is good, but a narrow focus that does not allow for adaptability can be crippling. The suppliers with whom I spoke seemed eager for feedback and able to navigate unexpected roads to successes that have often been different from what they had envisioned.

*How is your company adapting in the current economic environment? Have you faced any unexpected bumps in the road? Do you know where I can find a vibrating cow? Let me know at [krystal.gabert@advantagemedia.com](mailto:krystal.gabert@advantagemedia.com) [2].*

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