ABA Fall Conferences Examine Baking Issues and Trends, Educate and Prepare Executives

This fall, ABA hosted a plethora of conferences, bringing together industry professionals from every sector of the baking industry for networking; dialogue on common challenges and solutions; and updates and education on relevant topics to bakers and their suppliers.

More than 130 industry professionals gathered in Washington for the 2017 Fall Policy Conference and the NextGenBaker Public Policy Forum. The conference hosted six ABA Committee meetings covering a multitude of baking issues and trend discussions, as well as advocacy education, Capitol Hill visits with relevant elected officials, and networking with peers and members of Congress at the annual Bakers’ Dozen Reception.

More than 230 industry professionals gathered in San Antonio for the 2017 Technical Conference. Designed to educate cookie and cracker professionals through technical breakout sessions, attendees focused on production, technology, management and sustainability issues. Conference attendees were also able to check out the latest in products and services available at the new product display tables and tabletop exhibits.

Both fall conferences provided industry insight for professional growth and career advancement as well as multiple opportunities for business-to-business networking and connecting with peers.
2017 Fall Policy Conference Brings Industry Veterans and Emerging Leaders Together for Education and Advocacy

The 2017 Fall Policy Conference brought together some of the industry’s most savvy and experienced baking and allied executives with today’s emerging leaders for three days of rigorous policy discussions, advocacy and networking — with peers and colleagues as well as members of Congress. ABA Committees tackled issues and offered solutions to the industry’s most pressing challenges in the areas of commodities and agriculture, energy and environment, legal, logistics and workplace safety. ABA’s NextGenBaker Public Policy Forum addressed leadership development, the current political climate, and current industry and consumer trends.

Conference attendees also had the opportunity to make an impact in Washington and experience advocacy firsthand at the Bakers’ Dozen Reception and on visits to Capitol Hill.
Industry’s Next Generation of Leaders Comes to Washington


Attendees also engaged in an interactive professional development session with Dr. Rick Marks, who challenged the group to identify alignment between interpersonal relationships and professional relationships to achieve better leadership and management skills.

NGB programming also featured a presentation from Chris Davis, Congressional Research Service, about the executive and congressional branches of government and how they work together. Additionally, Michael Sansolo, Morning News Beat and the Coca Cola Research Council, presented attendees with valuable insights on disruption trends within the food industry.

NextGenBaker’s next event will be the annual networking reception held on April 15 in Scottsdale, Ariz., at the 2018 ABA Convention, and the next NGB Public Policy Forum will be held in the fall of 2018 in Washington, D.C. More NGB information is available on the ABA website.

Staying Ahead of “Uberization” Will Be the Key to Survival

At the NextGenBaker Welcome Reception, Tom Morrison, Tom Morrison & Associates, talked about the impact of “Uberization” in today’s marketplace and how to stay ahead of this new modern-day disruption.

“At Uberization means getting something cheaper and faster and having a better experience while doing it,” said Morrison. “Every CEO’s greatest fear is that their competitors will be the next Uber.”

Morrison described three dynamic forces causing Uberization: emerging technology, consumer buying habits and demographic shifts. See his key takeaways below.

According to Morrison, “Uber is a perfect example of how a company can come out of nowhere, and in a few short years create total havoc in an industry and dynamically turn a business model upside down.”

Morrison stated, “In order to get in front of Uberization, companies must discover where friction, anxiety and stress exist in five key areas: business model, product, delivery, customer experience and workforce culture. He continued, “Every company needs to leverage the ‘Internet of Things’ to capitalize on the future.” He defined the Internet of Things as maximizing the use of machines, people, process, technology and data.

**Keys to Leading Uberization:**

- Know Your Customers
- Foster Culture of Constant Innovation
- Implement Smart Technology
- Be Adaptable
- Have H.O.P.E.

H — Heck of an Attitude
O — Optimism
P — Passion
E — Energy
ABA honored Reps. Diane Black (R-TN) and Jackie Walorski (R-IN) with the Bakers’ Dozen Award at this year’s Bakers’ Dozen Awards Reception held each year on Capitol Hill to commend lawmakers for their commitment to supporting the baking industry. Nearly 850 attendees consumed ABA member products donated from 26 companies at the event. ABA members networked with members of Congress and their staffs in the Rayburn Building courtyard.


Sens. Jerry Moran (R-KS) and John Hoeven (R-ND) are also award recipients this year (not pictured).
Prior to heading to Capitol Hill to talk to lawmakers, ABA hosted a preparation session that included the always popular “Lobbying 101” session conducted by Joel Leftwich, Glover Park Group, as well as legislative and regulatory updates by the ABA Government Relations Team, led by ABA’s Lee Sanders, Senior Vice President, Government Relations & Public Affairs.

Leftwich encouraged attendees to form relationships with members of Congress and their staffs through consistent communication and stressed the importance of bakery/facility visits back in the districts.

Armed with the knowledge and know-how for their congressional visits, NextGenBaker and Fall Policy Conference attendees headed to Capitol Hill to discuss key topics impacting bakers, including harmonizing the definition of “employee” for independent contractors, the joint employer program, sugar reform and stiffer penalties for tray theft.

“The Hill visits are always interesting and worthwhile,” said NextGenBaker Co-Chair Brent Bradshaw, Flowers Foods. “Meeting with members of Congress and their staffs is time well spent communicating the baking industry’s priorities and positions, and it’s important that we conduct these visits on a regular basis to consistently reinforce our message with lawmakers.”

Transforming Safety Culture

Safety is hard, and building a safety culture is even harder. During the fall Safety Committee Meeting, ABA safety professionals discussed changing behaviors and embracing values that ensure they provide a safe workplace environment. Changing and embracing the culture begins at the top of an organization and filters down.

In the past year, the ABA Safety Recognition Program recognized more than 120 ABA members for achieving safety excellence in the workplace.
ABA Committee Meetings

CAPC Talks 2018 Farm Bill at Fall Policy Conference

The Commodity and Agriculture Policy Committee (CAPC) held a productive meeting as Washington gears up for the 2018 Farm Bill. Members engaged in important dialogue with U.S. House and Senate Agriculture Committee staff on industry priorities in the next Farm Bill — legislation that covers crop and commodity programs and important nutrition issues. Bakers focused on the need for Congress to act on reforming the outdated sugar program, which artificially drives up the price for U.S. sugar.

CAPC members were also treated to a great behind-the-scenes tour of the U.S. Capitol, directed by ABA member Kelly Johnston, Vice President of Government Affairs, Campbell Soup Company (Pepperidge Farm, Inc.).

Bakers Discuss Burden of EPA Refrigeration Rule

At the Energy & Environment Committee meeting, ABA continued dialogue with EPA regarding refrigeration repair requirements and the impact it is having on the baking industry. Ensuring that properly certified technicians are servicing the equipment and accurately recording repair records still remains a concern. Ultimately, the compliance burden lies with the baker, despite the technician’s servicing and documentation of the equipment.

ABA Prepares Bakers as FSMA “Hits the Field”

FDA updated FTRAC members on upcoming compliance dates for the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) and discussed the current inspection approaches FDA is taking in the field. To date, FDA is focusing on three types: CGMPs, broad assessments of preventive controls and a full preventive control inspection. ABA updated members on its leadership in continued efforts in advancing the nutrition facts label priorities. The baking industry is still in a holding pattern until FDA provides final conclusions and guidance on fiber and added sugars.

Participants also received an update on Prop 65 regulatory warning label changes for 2018, as well as an update on industry-wide coordinated efforts to address acrylamide.

Additionally, International Food Information Council representatives provided insight on consumer attitudes about food and their trust in the information provided from food manufacturers and who they trust the most when it comes to food and diet advice.

Amy-Gabrielle Bartolac, ABA’s Communications and Marketing Manager, introduced a media toolkit for ABA members to share to promote National Bread Month on their social media platforms.
ABA Committee Meetings

ABA Legal Committee Tackles Crisis Management, Tax Reform and Food Policy Issues

The ABA Legal Committee engaged with legal experts on key issues, including tax reform, labor policy, FDA nutrition and food safety, crisis management, digital evidentiary responsibility and an update on the activities of the Supreme Court. Legal and policy experts from Morgan Lewis, Covington and Burling, and the ABA team provided timely insight on emerging issues that gave member companies a leg up on legislative and regulatory activities that impact bakers. ABA shared its proactive efforts on both Capitol Hill and at the regulatory agencies. ABA Legal Committee members were able to receive valuable continuing legal education credit for this substantive meeting.

Fleet Efficiency, Hours of Service Exemptions, Tray Loss Solutions Addressed at Logistics Committee

At the ABA Logistics Committee meeting, participants engaged in roundtable discussions on tray loss issues, FMCSA guidelines and hours of service requirements. Additionally, attendees had the opportunity to hear from knowledgeable speakers on issues facing baker fleets. Following up on Capitol Hill visits in which tray loss was a key issue discussed with members of Congress, members first heard from former Walgreens Organized Retail Crime Director Jerry Briggs, who detailed his experience with combatting tray theft throughout the country. The committee spoke candidly about their own efforts to disrupt tray theft rings as well as discuss possible legislative solutions.

In perhaps the most impassioned segment of the meeting, members sat down and worked with legal counsel to draft language regarding hours of service exemptions that would allow bakers to deliver their products more efficiently during bun season as well as during periods of natural disaster. “With changes in Washington’s political climate, Logistics Committee members have been eager to find relief for issues facing bakers on both the road and rails,” said Mike Goscinski, ABA Director of Government Relations.

Workforce Issues Drive HR and Labor Conference Agenda

At ABA’s HR & Labor Conference, the group focused on important labor and workforce issues that impact the baking industry and its challenges in workforce development. A highlight of the meeting was a workshop given by Lisa Ryan, Chief Appreciation Strategist of Grategy. During her session, “Manufacturing Engagement: Smart Strategies to Keep Your Top Talent from Becoming Someone Else’s,” Ryan focused on the importance of expressing gratitude toward employees and demonstrated simple ways to engage your workforce.

The committee went to Capitol Hill to call on legislators for their support on key pieces of legislation that would roll back the Obama Administration’s joint employer rule and protect the industry’s use of independent contractors in their daily operations.
2017 Technical Conference

Spirit of Technical Conference Shines in San Antonio

An annual meeting steeped in deep history and tradition, the Technical Conference has been bringing cookie and cracker manufacturing professionals together for nearly a century. The merger allowed ABA and B&CMA to leverage their combined strength to plan this year’s event with even more focus on strong educational programming for which the conference is known and valued by the cookie and cracker industry.

As evidenced by this year’s dynamic technical sessions, hands-on learning and plentiful industry engagement opportunities, the spirit of the Technical Conference remained steadfast in San Antonio.

“This year’s Technical Conference delivered as promised and more,” said Dave Van Laar, ABA Senior Advisor to the President & CEO: B&CMA Transition & Development. “We were extremely pleased to provide the same technical training to our members in a seamless transition with the support of ABA.”

“The Education Committee and team did a fantastic job developing and executing a value-packed program. The General Session focus on the market and high-performing teams really hit the mark, and the breakout sessions and hands-on training were incredibly relevant,” said ABA President & CEO Robb MacKie. The General Session, with exclusive cookie and cracker retail insights by former Nielsen executive Todd Hale, inspired attendees with leadership solutions to strengthen the categories. Educational breakout sessions hit on crucial topics aimed at increasing effectiveness and efficiency in industry manufacturing.

“It struck me during the opening session that the merger was exactly the right move for B&CMA members and the industry as a whole. We are pleased to be serving a larger member base and look forward to growing the Technical Conference in the years to come,” said Van Laar.

The tradition of powerful networking continued with events like the Welcome and Western Receptions, a golf tournament, a city tour, a Women’s Networking Reception, gatherings before business sessions while checking out the new product displays and during the tabletop exhibits.
2017 Technical Conference

General Session Provides Customer Insight; Taps Into Current Industry Topics

**Former Nielsen SVP Todd Hale Provides States of the Industry and a Look Into the Industry’s Future**

Consumer insights thought leader Todd Hale provided an overview of the current retail landscape and performance. Projecting areas of growth for the future, Hale specifically focused on cookie and cracker categories. He examined trends on successful products and concepts, buyers and their purchasing habits, health and wellness’s impact on sales, digital shopping and retailing, and automation. A few of the takeaways were: To drive growth with particular demographic groups, ads need to be more diverse and representative of those groups; Americans want indulgent categories with the perception of freshness; grocers are looking to serve their own brands, causing a resurgence in private label; older generations are drawn to cookies while younger generations are drawn to crackers; although generating some growth, product lines with popular advertising claims (i.e., gluten-free, organic) only hold a small market share; health claims have more impact on affluent consumers; and a high level of promotional support is no guarantee for growth.

**Leadership Training and “Unlocking the Power of People” — Keys to Employee Retention and Satisfaction**

“In a world where recruiting and retention are becoming increasingly more difficult, investing in your team can make a big difference,” said Pat Richards, Vice President for Organizational Development, Hearthside Food Solutions. “An engaged workforce is critical to employee retention and satisfaction in today’s climate.”

Richards’ presentation highlighted ABA’s Leadership Development for Front Line Professionals, a training program produced in cooperation with Hearthside University and created to focus on the recruitment, development and retention of high-potential employees. This program provides the tools and techniques to deliver critical people and conflict resolution skills that are needed for emerging leaders and key people on the production floor.

**ABA’s NextGenBaker Strengthens Baking Industry’s Future Leadership**

Kelly Knowles, ABA Senior Director of Political Affairs, spoke to attendees about ABA’s leadership development committee — NextGenBaker (NGB).

“In a recent ABA membership survey, 83 percent of bakers responded that developing future leaders within their company was a major concern that kept them up at night,” said Knowles. “ABA is proud to offer a meaningful solution for ABA members in the NextGenBaker committee.”

NextGenBaker is dedicated to developing the future leadership of the baking industry by bringing together executives in a forum that informs participants on industry trends; encourages active participation in public policy; educates participants on the role of ABA and its activities; and most importantly, develops personal leadership and management skills.

Knowles highlighted the committee’s leadership, which is uniquely structured by having both a baker and an allied member for co-chairs. Current NGB Co-Chairs are Brent Bradshaw, Flowers Foods, and Brandon Woods, LeMatic, Inc.

NextGenBaker’s next event will be the annual networking reception held on April 15 in Scottsdale, Ariz., at the 2018 ABA Convention, and the next NGB Public Policy Forum will be held in the fall of 2018 in Washington, D.C.
ABA President & CEO Robb MacKie present Kathy Kinter Phelps with the inaugural Phelps Award with Nelson (husband), Haley (daughter), and ABA’s Dave Van Laar.

Kathy Kinter Phelps Honored for 20-Plus Years of Service to Industry, Receives Inaugural Award

During the General Session, ABA bestowed the namesake of and inspiration for the Phelps Award to Kathy Kinter Phelps. She was most recently the former Assistant Director of Education and Membership at the American Bakers Association, but most know her as an integral pillar of the Biscuit and Cracker Manufacturers’ Association (B&CMA) for 20 years and the pioneer of the Correspondence Manufacturing Course.

This newly created annual award will be presented to the graduating student with the second-highest grade point average in the Cookie and Cracker Academy’s Correspondence Manufacturing Course. The student with the highest grade point average is awarded the Vander Heide Award. “Kathy has been the backbone of cookie and cracker education over the years and saw it through to the standard it sets today,” said Dave Van Laar, ABA Senior Advisor to the President & CEO: B&CMA Transition & Development. “She took an interest in each member and diligently served them with professionalism and personalization. Her dedication to the members and the industry is exceptional; she will be dearly missed.”

Bakeries Recognized for Excellence in Safety with 2017 Chairman’s Safety Awards

“The Chairman’s Award for Safety Excellence recognizes facilities that demonstrate exemplary safety practices. ABA applauds these bakeries’ achievement and dedication,” said ABA President & CEO Robb MacKie. “These bakeries set the example for the industry, and ABA is tremendously proud to call them members.”

ABA President & CEO Robb MacKie present Kathy Kinter Phelps with the inaugural Phelps Award with Nelson (husband), Haley (daughter), and ABA’s Dave Van Laar.

Robb MacKie with representatives from companies recognized with this year’s safety awards.

2017 Chairman’s Award for Safety Excellence Recipients:
- D.F. Stauffer Biscuit Company, Inc. — Cuba, N.Y.
- Newly Weds Foods — Erlanger Division, Erlanger, Ky.
- D.F. Stauffer Biscuit Company, Inc. — Santa Ana, Calif.
- Newly Weds Foods — Cleveland Div., Cleveland, Tenn.
- Kellogg Company — Cary Bakery, Cary, N.C.
- Kellogg Company — Jackson Bakery, Jackson, Tenn.

Vander Heide Award Presented to Top Student

The Vander Heide Award is presented each year at the Technical Conference to the Cookie and Cracker Academy’s Correspondence Manufacturing Course graduate who receives the highest score (or grade point average). Benjamin Colon, a food scientist at D.F. Stauffer Biscuit Company, Inc., and Marine Corps veteran of the Gulf War, was the recipient of this year’s award for earning a grade point average of 98.21.

“On behalf of the American Bakers Association, I commend Ben for his diligence and commitment to strengthening his career, his company and the baking industry as a whole through education,” said ABA’s Dave Van Laar.

Stu Vander Heide, Schulze & Burch Biscuit Company, present this year’s Vander Heide Award to Benjamin Colon and Ben’s supervisor, Mardi Ung.
Hands-On Session Tests Real-Time Cause and Effect of Ingredients in Cookie and Cracker Baking

Once again, the Technical Conference Hands-On Session delivered an in-depth look at the art and science of cookie and cracker baking. The participants experienced, firsthand, the differences in ingredient types as well as processing.

This year included a deep dive into the world of leavening – a critical step in the baking process. Of the three common types of leavening: mechanical, biological or chemical, students focused on the chemical ingredients. Working with the common leavening ingredients, they varied the amount and processing of each one to test the results in the finished product. Each group worked with a different ingredient and varied the amounts. This gave them an excellent perspective of the processing problems that can occur in the actual bakery. After the product was baked, they compared all the variables to see the effects they had on the cookies.

Participants came from around the world and included bakers as well as suppliers. The varied backgrounds provided valuable input. ABA’s Dave Van Laar observed the practical applications of this session: “When our allied members understand more about the baking process, they can better collaborate with our baker members. They can also improve their technical communication skills by understanding the baking process, and learning where potential problems reside,” said Van Laar.

The participants also had the opportunity to ask technical questions of the ABA Technical Advisors who conducted the training, as well as delve into their own plant issues in side conversations with peers.

Expert Panel Provides Solutions to Bakers’ Common Issues

Bring on the questions! This year’s panel consisted of Dennis Loalbo, a seasoned baker with experience in production and research and development; Vince Tamborello, an expert in packaging machinery and line efficiency; and Michael Downing, who has been working on cookie and cracker production lines for over 24 years.

The audience took full advantage of the experts’ years of experience and brought forth some questions and challenges that had been troubling them at their plants. Not only were the experts able to provide feedback and solutions, but the audience as a whole worked together to help fellow bakers overcome some of the issues they described.

Loalbo helped a baker with the issue of his cookies sporadically sticking to the oven band. The solution? Loalbo suggested cleaning the band more regularly and adding an oil to grease the band to prevent the cookies from sticking. Tamborello provided advice about the difference between equipment owners and equipment operators and encouraged managers to incentivize operators to ensure upkeep and cleanliness of equipment. Downing discussed the importance of temperature and how it can alter your product. Downing was adamant that quality checks should always be in place to check and adjust water temperature for a consistent product.

“Everyone left the session with new knowledge and fresh ideas to bring back to their plant,” said ABA’s Dave Van Laar.
Working in Teams Helps Individuals Find “Hero Within”

Lunch speaker and former Navy Seal Curt Cronin told such vivid stories of wartime bravery and difficult decision making — you could almost imagine being on the battlefield next to him. Cronin’s military experience taught him that milliseconds made the difference between life and death and winning and losing. Translating his personal experience into business situations, Cronin shared actionable plans for building unstoppable teams, unlocking potential and leading through uncertainty. “There is a greater chance for individual survival if you work as a team,” said Cronin. “Each person’s strength becomes that strength for the team.”

Cronin also shared that we make higher goals for teams than ourselves. “We’ll do more for others than we do for ourselves,” he said. “Partnering together to accomplish common objectives helps us align for purpose.”

Breakout Sessions Emphasize Increasing Paybacks While Reducing Wasted Resources

The hallmark of the annual Technical Conference is the educational programming that is integral to cookie and cracker manufacturing professionals. This year’s program was designed with sessions to educate attendees on implementing processes with immediate paybacks that maximize savings while preserving resources.

“The Technical Conference is a premier platform for educating attendees on how to use the same amount of resources to yield less waste and more savings,” said Dave Van Laar, ABA Senior Advisor to the President & CEO: B&CMA Transition & Development. “For example, through strategic modification, a baker can reduce bad batches, which cuts scrap but can also save bakers thousands of dollars.”

“The vision of the Technical Conference is to keep the baking industry current, efficient and ahead on their bottom-line goals,” said ABA President & CEO Robb MacKie.

Sessions provided expertise and guidance on everything from increasing output while increasing efficiency to leadership and training to answering more technical questions related to ovens, ingredients and equipment design.

Another hot topic of discussion this year included reducing the cost of mandatory Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) implementation and kill-step validation through the available FDA-accepted kill-step validation calculator for potential savings of $20,000 per SKU.
2017 Technical Conference

Training and Leadership Are More Important Than Ever to Ensure a Successful Operation

ABA and Kellogg Partner for Cookie & Cracker Academy Onsite Training

Ashley Dougan, Continuous Improvement Leader, Kellogg Company, presented her company’s experience with the Cookie & Cracker Academy’s (CCA) Onsite Training Program in a production facility in one of the Technical Conference breakout sessions. Kellogg was presented with a challenge: One-fourth of their workforce were new employees and in need of the basics of cookie and cracker manufacturing. Most had little or no baking experience, resulting in processing challenges such as fluctuation in dough consistency, which resulted in packing complications.

ABA trainers, including Dave Van Laar and Rich McFeaters, customized the program to meet Kellogg’s needs. During the training that took place over four days and four nights, students participated in mixing exercises, ingredient identification exercises and cracker mixing experiments. The science of temperature, lay time, mixing and processing were covered. Upon completion of these hands-on exercises, the training program brought all employees to a higher level of knowledge, skills and abilities required for effective job performance.

Dougan said that the hands-on aspect helped students see actual examples of mistakes in the process that resulted in out-of-spec products, helping them to better understand the causes. As one seasoned student observed and related to the other students, “It is very important to do it according to the formula and be consistent every time.”

Three Most Important Resources to Any Company: People, People and People

“...” shared Rich Holland, Senior Director of Manufacturing, TreeHouse Foods, in one of the Technical Conference breakout sessions.

Holland spoke to attendees about employee retention and how to address challenges many companies in the baking industry face trying to keep skilled, qualified employees. Holland stressed the importance of a balanced approach when it comes to the onboarding process, training and the engagement culture. While these are not the only pieces that prepare an employee for their job, without them, chances are that new hires won’t make it past the first few months. He advised to be sure to also consider timely, transparent and informative communication as the key ingredient to engaging and building trust with employees.

“...” concluded.

For Full Coverage of Technical Conference Breakout Sessions: www.americanbakers.org/2017TechConf
“Stronger Together” 2017 ABA Fall Meeting Highlights
Save the Dates

2018 ABA Convention
April 14-18, 2018
The Phoenician
Scottsdale, AZ
Hotel Rate: $399

ABA Front Line Leadership Training
January 23-25, 2018
Sheraton Norfolk Waterside Hotel
Norfolk, VA
Hotel Rate: $105

Future Technical Conferences

2018 ABA Technical Conference
October 28-31, 2018
Hyatt Regency Indianapolis
Indianapolis, IN
Hotel Rate: $169

2019 ABA Technical Conference
October 20-23, 2019
Marriott Marquis Atlanta
Atlanta, GA
Hotel Rate: $169

2020 ABA Technical Conference
October 25-28, 2020
Westin Kansas City Crown Center
Kansas City, MO
Hotel Rate: $179

IBIE Booth Contracts
Coming in January!

IBIE 2019
Sept. 8-11, 2019
Las Vegas Convention Center
Las Vegas, Nevada