

Consumer home textiles spending ticks up in March



The big headline about March sales today is purposeful - but when slack auto sales are removed from the equation, retail had a decent month. Housing-related purchases, including furniture and home furnishings as well as building materials, contributed to growth in retail sales in March, according to the National Retail Federation. Consumer spending in March showed a year-over-year increase of 5.8%.

Excluding automobiles, gasoline stations and restaurants, seasonally adjusted retail sales increased 0.3% from February, according to NRF calculations based on Commerce Department data. Sales at furniture and home furnishings stores were up 3.4% year-over-year. Sales at building equipment & garden supply dealers were up 10.8%. "Consumer spending remained healthy in March, despite weakness throughout the broader economy in the first quarter of 2016," noted Jack Kleinhenz, NRF chief economist. "While colder temperatures in March lessened spending on apparel, recent job and income gains indicate positive prospects for future household spending." Segments that did not post strength in month-over-month included clothing and non-store sales. ■

Source: *Home & Textiles Today*

Serving it Hot for Hispanics

Retailers and manufacturers across multiple home categories launch new products for this important shopper

Hispanics are a formidable group, hailing from 28 Latin countries with diversely rich cultures and foods. And as the Hispanic population continues to grow in the United States, its influence on how all Americans eat, cook and decorate their homes will continue to rise. The potential is exciting to think about, considering the Hispanic population is growing exponentially compared to non-Hispanics in the United States.



The growing numbers, combined with the cultural inclination for Hispanic families to eat together, translates into a significant amount of food preparation and subsequent cookware and accessories needs. Almost half (47 percent) of all immigrants living in the United States last year were classified Hispanic, according to Pew Research Center, and the population share of Hispanics will

rise from 17.3 percent (55.3 million) in 2014 to 24 percent (105.8 million, a calculation based on Pew Research Center projected figures) by 2065.

Marketing to this group as well as other ethnic groups has its challenges. A one-size-fits-all mentality will not work for this but for those willing to delve into addressing the nuances and subcategories, rich opportunities await. One way to wade through all the cultural nuances is to focus first on the similarities between the groups. In general, the behavior is very similar for many of them. If consumers eat plantains (not in restaurants, but at home), they are from countries in the Caribbean and South America; if they eat tortillas at home, then they likely hail from the Mexico/Central American region. Hispanics are also very family oriented. Holidays are important, big and inclusive. Between Christmas and New Year's Eve, for example, Hispanic families make tamales for themselves and others. Other religious and country holidays, such as Lent and Mexico's Independence Day, also rank high for members of this group, which means a lot of food is cooked for a lot of family members. Latin dishes are usually family style and need larger vessels. Many people are frying fish as well as grilling, so items that help cook those meals are essential. One sees a seasonal spike. As for the U.S. holiday of Thanksgiving, many will incorporate their traditions into this feast, perhaps serving roast pig with rice and beans instead of turkey or have both.

Younger consumers courted throughout home furnishings are more educated about food than ever. The third-generation Hispanics are very hip, but very traditional. Different generations also demand different product features. While a grandmother likes aluminum cookware, a wife prefers nonstick for easy clean up and a daughter wants glass lids so she can see the food cooking. Younger consumers are going to college, buying a home—it's a whole evolution from five years ago. Hispanic-style cookware and kitchen products have also become more widespread, and many lines have improved quality as a result. At the store level, packaging is key. Products must be multifunctional if possible to broaden their appeal; a griddle needs to show that it can make both tortillas or pancakes, for example. ■ Source: *HFN*