Caramel can be many things—a color, a flavor, a delicious confection. It is one of the most popular flavors in the U.S. market and can be found in confections, bakery goods, ice cream, etc. Our focus here will be on the confectionery aspect.

Caramels—confections based on milk ingredients—typically have an appealing brown color and unique sweet taste. Classic caramel flavors and colors are the result of heating an amino acid and reducing sugars together in a process called the *Maillard reaction*. Caramel textures can range from grained like fudge, to soft and flowy, to sticky, to chewy, to hard like toffee.

**TYPES OF CARAMELS**

There are many variations of caramels. Caramel types include extruded/enrobing, depositing, caramelized sugar, low water activity and sugarfree. This being caramel basics, we will discuss the two types most found in confections: extruded/enrobing and depositing caramels.

**Extruded/Enrobing Caramel**

Extruded/enrobing caramel is what most people consider as a caramel. It is usually a smooth, chewy, flavorful, dark brown confection with standup qualities (very important). This product is the result of heating sugars, milk ingredients, corn syrup and fats/oils together. The above-mentioned Maillard reaction will produce the characteristic color and flavor. Typical moisture and fat contents are each 8 to 12 percent with nonfat milk solids in the 9 to 15.5 percent range and protein 3.7 to 5 percent.

**Depositing Caramel**

The most common characteristic of a depositing caramel is a soft, flowy texture. It can often be seen in moulded confections, ice cream variegates and bakery goods. This soft texture is often the result of higher moisture content (15% – 20%), which may require the use of a preservative such as potassium sorbate to maintain a microbiably stable product. When formulating this caramel, we want to minimize stringing and dripping to have a clean deposit. This can be accomplished by inducing a grain or having incomplete fat emulsification.

These caramels may use classic extruded caramel or caramelized sugar caramel as a base. When classic extruded caramel is used as a base, the product can be cooked to a low temperature to maintain high moisture content. To obtain sufficient color and flavor, this product is held for an extended caramelization time, or it can be cooked to a higher temperature, which allows for more