Chipotle Removing More Unnatural Ingredients – Sourdough Culture to Replace Tortilla Preservatives

Chipotle made waves earlier this year when they announced that they would be eliminating GMOs from their menu. After eliminating GMO cornstarch from its tortillas, the company is now further streamlining its tortilla recipe in an attempt to offer its customers a product as close to a homemade tortilla as possible. From an admittedly short list of eleven ingredients, Chipotle's downsizing its ingredient list even further to a mere four: whole-wheat flour, oil, salt, and water.

Mass-producing this tortilla presents a number of problems, chief among them taste, shelf life, and logistics. Early test runs have created tortillas with the elasticity needed for burritos and a nutty taste most likely be attributed to Chipotle's decision to use more health-conscious whole-wheat flour. But when a company is serving upwards of 800,000 tortillas a day, taste and texture are not the only concerns. It needs to produce a product that is consistent and always available. The typical means to increase shelf life would be the addition of preservatives to the product. Being health conscious, Chipotle said no to preservatives and found a solution both simple and elegant: sourdough.

The Oldest Leavened Bread

Fermentation is one of the earliest forms of food preservation. Sourdough has rich history as the first leavened bread, and its use of naturally occurring yeast has made it accessible to anyone since it was recognized. Using this time-

tested method for insuring its bread would last longer, Chipotle is able to keep the shelf life its tortillas without lab derived chemicals *and* provide a healthier product that appeals to the informed consumer.

Lactobacilli bacteria is responsible for the unique sourdough flavor as it ferments the bread, breaking down gluten and other proteins. The bacteria also acts as a probiotic. This breakdown makes sourdough easier to digest than breads made with conventional yeast, making sourdough bread a potential option for those who are unable to easily digest modern bread products.

Of course there are logistical issues, as sourdough requires a consistent temperature, a quiet place to develop, and the time to properly ferment. Starting and maintaining a sourdough culture can be a daunting task. A tortilla factory is accustomed to expanding commercial dough balls with yeast and then immediately pressing, baking, and packaging tortillas for sale. So far Don Pancho Authentic Mexican Foods in Salem, Oregon, which is serving as the test factory, is dealing with the logistics needed for fermentation by designating a separate room where the sourdough cultures can ferment before being shaped and baked. Chipotle plans on perfecting the process then expanding it throughout the entire chain, region by region.

Our Food Conversation

Chipotle’s commitment to serve “Food with Integrity” is the culinary equivalent of the canary in the coalmine – can fast food be both healthy and profitable?

Though the average diner may not have entered the conversation about what’s in our food, where it’s coming from, and what our planet can actually sustain, there is a growing number of people who want quality, healthy dining options.

This conversation needs to continue on an increasingly larger scale. Though Chipotle has always been a part of this conversation due to their transparency, they entered it in a big way when they banned GMOs. It’s up to us to reward this business for its courage and integrity. Remember, as always, we vote with our dollars.

Further Reading:

- *Foods That Lead to a Leaky Gut*
- *Understanding and Detoxifying GMOs*
- *Gluten, Candida, Leaky Gut Syndrome, and Autoimmune Diseases*
- *Is Wheat Poison? What’s Behind The Rise Of Celiac Disease And Gluten Intolerance?*
- *Fermented Foods Optimize Your Health*

Sources:

- *Chipotle’s Quest to Develop a Better Tortilla* – NY Times
- *Tortilla Journey* – Chipotle
- *The History Of Sourdough Bread* – Sourdough