



Corn Shines In Bakery Spotlight

While sometimes overlooked, dry corn ingredients bring versatility, flavor and nutritional benefits to a wide range of baked goods. Whether formulating tasty gluten-free treats or adding a nutritional boost to baked goods, dry corn ingredients can serve as the foundation for breads, crackers, cookies, muffins and more.

Corn is especially well suited for gluten-free products. “Early on, there were very few gluten-free choices, especially in the sweet baked goods space,” recalls Keith Smith, regional technical service lead for Cargill. “Today, we see companies expanding their gluten-free product lines and working to improve their existing products. Given corn’s gluten-free status, it’s a natural fit.”

In these products, corn’s flavor is a big benefit. Many of the wheat flour alternatives used in gluten-free applications are expensive and typically have bland flavors. In contrast, corn’s naturally sweet taste offers formulators an easy-to-work-with foundation for their gluten-free sweet treats. As an added benefit, corn flour has a lower cost-in-use than other alternatives commonly used in gluten-free products.

Versatile across a wide range of applications, corn flour serves as an affordable bulking agent in gluten-free baked goods, but as with most wheat flour alternatives, texture can be a challenge. “It all depends on what you’re trying to achieve,” Smith explains. “If you need to bind something, corn is great. If you’re trying to get a bread to rise, it can be a little more difficult, but we can do that, too.”

As proof, Cargill has created gluten-free sliced bread products made with significant levels of corn flour. The breads taste great and are well received by consumer sensory panels. But when it comes to gluten-free creations, Smith ranks the company’s streusel-style muffin prototype as one of his favorites. “For indulgent, gluten-free sweet products, the taste advantages inherent with corn flour make it a clear winner over other alternatives,” he explains.

Smith notes that some gluten-free consumers are looking for more than texture and taste. Claims such as non-GMO and clean label are increasingly important. Cargill’s dry corn ingredients can meet those market desires too. As pantry staples, corn flour and corn bran are well known and accepted by consumers. In addition, the company has offered non-GMO dry corn ingredients for more than two decades, recently earning Non-GMO Project Verified certification for the product line.

One final point of contention in the gluten-free market landscape is nutrition. Using whole-grain corn products such as Cargill’s MaizeWise® ingredients can help improve the overall nutritional profile of the final product — whether it’s gluten-free or a traditional baked good.

“We know consumers don’t get the fiber they need,” Smith explains. “With corn bran and whole-grain corn flour products, we can help increase fiber levels, using a product that consumers understand.”

An insoluble dietary fiber, whole-grain corn flour contains 8 grams of fiber in 100 grams of flour. Corn bran, which contains 86 percent total dietary fiber and is considered a source of intact and intrinsic dietary fiber, provides another option for fiber enrichment. Using corn bran, Cargill has helped customers create great-tasting baked goods with as much as 6 grams of fiber in a single serving, qualifying for an “excellent source of fiber” claim.

“Increasingly, our customers are asking to formulate with simple products,” Smith emphasizes. “Corn bran and whole-grain corn flour fit that definition to a tee. They are good alternatives to other, less familiar fibers which may not be as label friendly.”

continued

Beyond fiber, Cargill's MaizeWise® whole-grain corn products can be used to achieve the FDA-approved whole-grain claim. It's a designation consumers value. According to Mintel, 57 percent of consumers are interested in whole grains when purchasing foods they consider to be healthy. That finding is backed up by results from the 2016 International Food Information Council Food and Health survey, which found 76 percent of respondents rate whole grains as "healthy" compared to only 33 percent for enriched grains.

Cargill's MaizeWise® whole-grain corn proprietary processing technology assures that all the key attributes of the corn kernel are consistent from batch to batch. Nutritional label claims are not at risk with changing crops or agronomics. Cargill's unique whole-grain processing differentiates its products from others in the market.

"Corn is a very old ingredient, yet it fits perfectly into so many of today's trends," Smith notes. "Whether it's gluten free, clean label, or health and wellness, dry corn ingredients are a cost-effective way to translate consumer desires into everything from breads and buns to pizza crusts and sweet baked goods."

Ancient grain delivers Southwestern flair

Corn flour has been a staple of American diets for thousands of years, dating back to the Native Americans who first domesticated the grain. Still, creative bakers continue to find new uses for this established ingredient. Some of the most innovative are tapping into the unique qualities of corn masa flour.

While this distinctive flour is typically associated with fried products such as taco shells and tostadas, it can be a great addition to baked goods. Masa flour is made from corn kernels that are partially cooked then ground. The result is a masa flour that packs a powerful, authentic corn flavor.

"We're starting to see more companies leverage masa flour to create baked products that really stand out," notes Keith Smith, Cargill's regional technical service lead. "Today's consumers want more authentic taste experiences. Masa flour can deliver that unique flavor experience customers crave."

Smith has helped bakers use masa flour to craft everything from Southwestern-style crackers to frozen sandwiches encased in a masa-flour-based pastry. Given the long-standing popularity of Southwestern cuisine, Smith expects to see continued innovation with masa flour, extending well beyond its traditional applications.