

ARMOUR FOOD CO.

Armour Mini Corn Dogs

A scorching August day at a fair. An abundance of sights, sounds, smells, and, especially, tastes.

For such an occasion, nothing goes down better than a steamy corn dog, preferably accompanied by an ice cold, freshly prepared lemonade.

Consider that corn dog.

According to Fran Altman, the director of the National Hot Dog and Sausage Council, corn dogs are a regional specialty that originated at county fairs. Consumption of these hot dog (or, if you prefer, frankfurter) hybrids is particularly strong in Dallas and the Southwest where a number of chains operate.

Of corn dog growth, Altman says: "There's a lot of potential for a variety of marketing."

About two years ago Armour Food Co. Div. of ConAgra (Omaha, Neb.) foresaw corn dog marketing potential and subsequently showed several of its foodservice customers a prototype product.

"They just went crazy over it," recalls Orinda Tims, marketing manager.

Contest judges at Gorman's Foodservice New Products Contest agreed with that enthusiastic initial response and awarded Armour Mini Corn Dogs honors as best appetizer.

The product is a batter-wrapped, half-ounce cocktail frank, a miniature version of Armour's corn dog. Unlike its larger counterparts, the Mini Corn Dog is stickless.

"Because it is stickless, we found that adults like it as much as or more than children do," says group leader Louis Cooperhouse.

Armour Mini Corn Dogs may lack sticks, but they do not lack flavor. One succinct judge said, "Tasty!" Another elaborated further by commenting: "The hot dog was moist, while the corn meal batter had very good texture and was quite tasty."

Of course, good taste was no accident.



Armour Mini Corn Dogs.

"We had done quite a bit of consumer research on regular corn dogs and carried that knowledge over to the Mini Corn Dog. We found that consumers prefer a sweet, crunchy type of batter, so that's the type of batter we developed," Tims says.

Adds Cooperhouse, "We also developed our own application system to properly coat the frank with the batter."

The batter in Armour's formulation is enriched, used specifically for the purpose of enabling the product to meet school lunch program requirements for bread. The company plans to introduce Mini Corn Dogs into school lunch programs this fall.

"I see a real opportunity in schools," says Tims. "Kids just love them." Tims, however, views bars and fast food outlets as the potentially the biggest market for the product.

The former market presents a special opportunity because bars are offering a wider range and variety of appetizers than ever before. This enables bar customers to fill up on food rather than alcoholic beverages. For the latter market, Armour has already shown the product to various fast food chains.

According to Armour, Mini Corn Dogs are targeted to users of pre-cooked, convenient meat products.

They were developed to meet consumer needs for convenient finger foods that are tasty and fun to eat.

The product's rollout took place in September 1987. In its official trade-show debut, the Mini Corn Dog's reception at the 1988 National Restaurant Assoc. show in May was "excellent," according to Armour.

"The Mini Corn Dog makes a great first impression and repeat purchase is excellent, too," says Cooperhouse.

The product is shipped frozen in cases weighing 10 lbs. (net weight); a case contains 320 Mini Corn Dogs.

Because the Mini Corn Dogs are fully cooked, they can be prepared quickly. To prepare, frozen Mini Corn Dogs are deep-fried in 360°F oil for about 1-1/2 to 2 minutes, or until golden brown and heated throughout. They also can be baked in a conventional oven at 425°F for 4 to 5 minutes if thawed or 7 to 8 minutes if frozen.

The product can be heated in a microwave on high power for about 30 to 45 seconds.

Mini Corn Dogs can be served as a snack food, hors d'oeuvres, side dish or as a main-meal entree as well.

Tims characterizes the product concept as a relatively simple idea that was difficult to make practical.

If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, then Armour should be flattered. Already several competitors have picked up on the idea.

Armour Mini Corn Dogs ingredients:

Batter—water, wheat flour, corn meal, sugar, modified corn starch, soybean oil, whole eggs, nonfat milk, soy flour, leavening (sodium acid pyrophosphate, sodium bicarbonate, monocalcium phosphate), salt, wheat starch, lecithin. Deep-fried in vegetable oil.

Cocktail frank—beef and pork, water, dextrose, salt, corn syrup, spice, flavorings, sodium erythorbate, sodium nitrite, and oleoresin of paprika.