

Third-generation Hispanics desire the traditional elements of their food culture

As the Hispanic population in the United States continues to grow, many third-generation Hispanics desire to experience traditional elements of their food culture. This desire is promoting a surge of interest in authentic flavors throughout the country.

“We’re seeing an influx of third-generation Hispanics wanting to be more educated in the more traditional foods that were experienced by their parents and grandparents,” said Glenda Murray, development chef with Sargento Food Ingredients, Plymouth, Wis. “This includes more experimentation of cooking techniques and familiarity of traditional ingredients such as chilies and other spices.”

Ms. Murray said food manufacturers have to keep in mind the flavors need to be authentic. She said many mainstream items have their purpose, but interest lies in authenticity, and that coincides with what Hispanic families knew growing up.

While third-generation consumers desire the flavors they are familiar with, Ms. Murray said, they don’t know how to prepare them. This presents chefs and food scientists with unique challenges as many traditional cuisine elements, such as moles, take a long time to prepare.

“We need to develop those real Hispanic flavors in the moles and salsas so we can eliminate the time it takes to prepare, but also still keep those familiar flavors for them,” she said.

The authentic preparation method for mole takes eight to 12 hours. Ms. Murray said to develop convenient mole

Back to the future

products, she works with a food scientist. They begin with the traditional ingredients and preparation method, but the food scientist observes where the various flavor notes, such as smoke or chocolate, originate and then develops ideas on how to replicate the flavors more quickly.

“Each ingredient is taken and looked at, and we taste and taste and taste,” she said. “We have a gold standard we go by. If it doesn’t match the gold standard, we go back to the bench, and we continue to find ingredients that will work.”

Consumers are discovering moles don’t have to be spicy and may be used to provide other elements of flavor.

“Because some of the cooking techniques are so time-consuming for the on-the-go third generation, we are going to see more authentic sauces, condiments and marinades instead of mainstream items,” Ms. Murray said.

Sources of inspiration

Food trucks and street vendors are a source of inspiration for Hispanic flavors and a way of exposing many consumers to the flavors, according to Phil Sprovieri, vice-president of sales and marketing at Flavorchem Corp., Downers Grove, Ill.

Yet the flavors aren’t always easy to replicate because the same ingredients aren’t always available at the price and scale needed, said Michelle Polach, applications manager with Flavorchem.

“Processors cannot easily duplicate the homemade preparations and methods used by vendors to create the flavor nuances in foods and beverages found in many geographic locales,” Mr. Sprovieri said. “No two recipes are exactly the same, and preparations aren’t subject to the many variables associated with raw materials which need to be controlled for mass production.”

As a result, Flavorchem uses blends of oils, oleoresins, botanical distillates, extracts and other

flavor ingredients to achieve consistency and authenticity. Advanced distillation techniques may create unique botanical distillates and oil fractions to develop true natural flavor notes.

Mr. Sprovieri said lime and cilantro notes are important in salsas. One challenge in developing salsas commercially is when dehydrated cilantro is used, it does not have the fresh chopped flavor characteristics any longer. It is like using dehydrated chives. Chipotle peppers with a good smoked flavor are not readily available, and the company enhances those flavors as well.

Mixing peppers and chilies with different fruits, such as mango chili or habanero lime cilantro blends, are emerging flavor combinations, Ms. Polach said.

Cumin and canela cinnamon are important flavors, while chocolate and vanilla are popular flavor notes that are often incorporated into moles, according to Mr. Sprovieri.

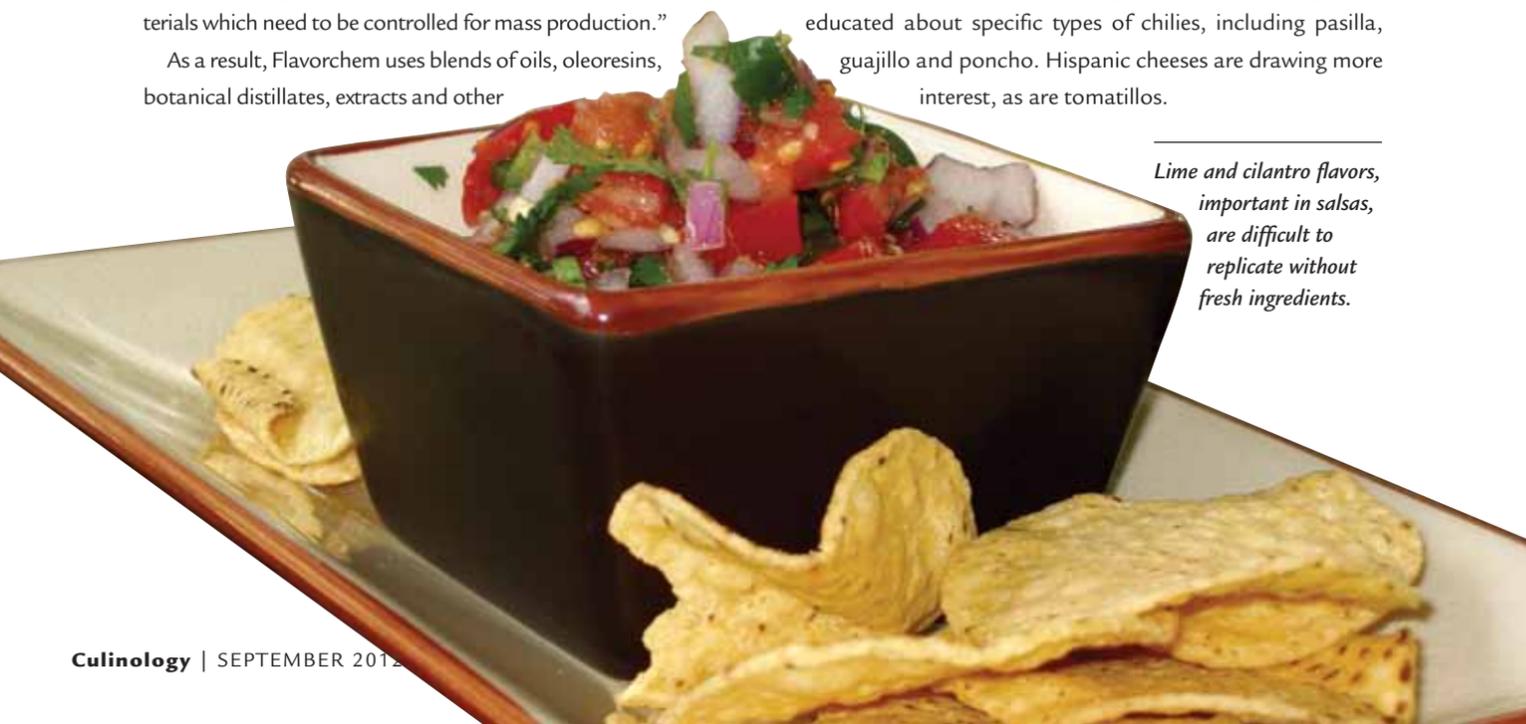
Developing new flavor concepts

Consumers are finding Hispanic sauces and condiments don’t have to be spicy, but many people still desire the heat.

“Chili peppers are now more than ever extremely popular,” said Matthew Freistadt, corporate chef and manager culinary research and development for Wixon, St. Francis, Wis. “Serrano, hatch, guajillo, New Mexico reds and habanero are just some of the most popular ones present among restaurant chefs and manufactured sauce companies. Tapatio and Cholula are two hot sauces that have been around for decades, but now these profiles are peaking, especially among kids ranging from ages 6 to 18.”

Ms. Murray said consumers in general are becoming more educated about specific types of chilies, including pasilla, guajillo and poncho. Hispanic cheeses are drawing more interest, as are tomatillos.

Lime and cilantro flavors, important in salsas, are difficult to replicate without fresh ingredients.



Traditional Hispanic flavors take time to develop, so ingredients that help consumers skip a few steps are in high demand.



Hispanic cheeses, tomatillos, and chilies including poncho, pasilla and guajillo are gaining popularity.

Wixon is currently working on sausage and meat applications, according to Mr. Freistadt. He said the company is using foundation flavors from traditional dishes and applying them to seasoning systems that go into chicken, pork and beef applications. Chicken is the most popular protein, so Wixon develops products such as a mango chipotle in a chicken meatball. He said chefs create in-house sausage recipes like chorizo. Popcorn and grain chips with guajillo and macaroni and cheese seasonings are some other projects his company is exploring.

Barbara Zatto, director of culinary at Mizkan Americas, Inc., Mount Prospect, Ill., said the quick-service and fast-food companies are working more with green sauces, and the sauces are often green chili- or tomatillo-based. Vinaigrette- or chimichurri-based marinades are also popular, as is Cuban mojos, a sour, bitter, orange-based marinade usually used on pork.

Mr. Freistadt said Hispanic-influenced marinades include adobos tweaked with chili, al pastor style being used on pork chops, pork steak or pibil, pork marinated in orange, annatto seeds and spices and then wrapped in banana leaves.

Ms. Zatto also emphasized the popularity of al pastor, a red sauce with chilies, vinegar, garlic and chipotles that she said originated in Morelos, Mexico.

Mizkan is working on green sauce projects, playing off the acid, roasted and fruit notes as well as experimenting with different levels of heat. Acid is an important element to Hispanic sauces and condiments because many of the meats found in Hispanic cuisines are tougher cuts that need to be broken down and marinated to make them more tender.

Hispanic flavors of the future

Ms. Zatto said keeping dishes authentic while appealing to the mainstream palate in the United States is a challenge. Companies

need to keep in mind who their demographic is and to whom they are selling when developing products. She said products need to be exciting and new but not so foreign to the mainstream.

“You can’t make something that tastes mainstream, because that’s not what they are looking for,” Sargento’s Ms. Murray said.

Ms. Zatto said it becomes a challenge to develop authentic products with a clean label while also keeping in mind the desired shelf life and price point. Yet the flavors are here to stay.

“Global cuisine is going to be the new American cuisine,” she said. “There is a lot of overlap in various cuisines that take into consideration sweet, sour, hot, smoky, and I think a lot of these ingredients can be used interchangeably.” She is getting more requests for South American food including Peruvian and Brazilian.

Overall, Ms. Murray said she believes consumers are taking something familiar, such as a casserole dish or steak, and adding a Hispanic element. Adding a new ingredient to something they are familiar with gives consumers more exposure and education, and they aren’t as hesitant to try new ingredients.

But Mr. Sprovieri said it has been challenging at times to get US and Canadian manufacturers to try newer Hispanic flavors. He said if manufacturers put the products on the shelves more, consumers would be more than willing to try them. Research and Flavorchem’s experience support that consumers are always looking for new flavors, especially ethnic.

“I think it’s going to be all over,” Ms. Murray said of Hispanic flavors in the future. “We are going to differentiate from mainstream. You are going to find us going more authentic.

“The third generation is going to take authentic to a whole new level,” she continued. “They are going to be playing with these ingredients. The American public, who are getting so interested in Hispanic cuisine, are also going to play with the authentic ingredients.” ●