

**PREPARED FOODS**

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# Grab and Go: From Streets to the Retail Market



While portability and convenience are important to today's consumer, the trend is not new. Portable, hand-held foods can be found world wide, and many cultures' popular street foods are some of the tastiest, best examples.

*Wilbert Jones, Contributing Editor*

The grab-n-go concept is not new. In ancient Egypt some 5,000 years ago, historians say the local Egyptians ate freshly baked bread that was sometimes flavored with cooked onions and garlic, and drank beer in the streets of Memphis, the former capital of Egypt.

Today, throughout the world, the concept of portability continues to thrive in many forms. It is not unusual to find women vendors on the streets of Brazil, Central and West Africa, and the Caribbean, frying up *acaraje* (black-eyed peas and shrimp fritters) in large black pots of hot oil. Or, while strolling through the streets of Paris, spotting beautiful street booths (that look like restaurants on wheels), where vendors make chocolate, fruit jam and Grand Marnier crepes; these sometimes are topped with handmade whipped cream. The crepes are served hot, folded in quarters and wrapped in wax paper. In Southeast Asia, vendors sell all sorts of street food, from bowls of rice noodles to a variety of spring rolls. Also, on the streets of Italy (especially in small towns and cities), panini sandwiches are sold everywhere.

For generations, when one thought of American street grab-n-go foods, items such as hotdogs, hamburgers and French fries were the most important part of America's landscape. Nowadays, ethnic ingredients and unique flavors that have been marketed successfully in the restaurant industry and grocery retail marketplace also are part of the American mainstream menu. For example, the world's largest restaurant chain, McDonald's, features a successful line of chicken snack wraps on its menu. One of the most popular flavors is the chipotle BBQ, which is made of chicken strips, a soft flour tortilla, shredded cheese, shredded lettuce and a chipotle barbecue sauce. The chicken strips can be prepared fried or grilled.

**The Marketplace**

Whole Foods Markets, in the northern California area, has launched a new line of "raw food" under a grab-n-go concept. Restaurant chef Roxanne Klein collaborated with Whole Foods and came up with 34 food products in the initial rollout. Some of the items were pinwheel sandwiches; garlic-and-onion flavored, spreadable nut cheese; a dried corn-cashew-pistachio trail mix; and a variety of mild-flavored nut hummus. Chef Klein's goal was to create foods that taste so delicious to consumers that they would be willing to try them whether they understood, believed or agreed in the philosophy of eating raw foods. Chef Klein also teamed up with world-famous chef Charlie Trotter to co-author a book called *Raw* (Ten Speed Press, 2003). Many of the recipes in the book used

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**Seasonings for Portable Foods in Mexico**

Preparation	Ingredients	Use
Achiote recado	Annatto seeds, allspice, black pepper, chile powder, oregano, garlic, citrus juice	Barbecued pork for <i>tortas</i> , <i>carnitas</i> and <i>empanadas</i>
Garlic rub	Allspice, oregano, garlic, cumin, cloves	Grilled steak, chicken or vegetables for <i>tortas</i>
Chipotle rub	Chipotle chiles, ancho chiles, garlic, oregano, salt	Grilled steak chicken or vegetables for <i>tortas</i> and <i>empanadas</i>
Pumpkin seed recado	Pumpkin seeds, garlic, cilantro, epazote, cumin, jalapeño	Dip for Mexican <i>empanadas</i> ; toppings for bread
Male amarillo	Guajillo chiles, tomatoes, onions, tomatillos, cilantro, cloves, garlic, chicken	Filling for Oaxacan <i>empanadas</i>
Adobo	Ancho chiles, pasilla chiles, cinnamon, cloves, pepper, thyme, marjoram, cumin, garlic	Pork in adobo for <i>tortas</i>

Source: Gilroy Foods & Flavors, Food & FlavorCast

Street-vended foods constructed so they can be consumed with one hand create instant portability. *Empanadas*, found in various Latin American countries by different names, usually are made by folding a round-shaped dough patty over a stuffing, resulting in its typical, semi-circular shape. Mexican *tortas*, generally a sandwich made with an oblong, crusty white roll, are said to be increasingly popular in the U.S.

the basic techniques of juicing, dehydrating and blending, the same concepts used in chef Klein's restaurant and the product line at Whole Foods Markets.

Stefano Foods recently launched a new, hand-held sandwich called Chicken Parmigiana Stromboli, adding to its line of stuffed bread sandwiches. This 15oz stromboli is made with chunks of white meat chicken, Stefano's signature red sauce, mozzarella, provolone and Parmesan cheeses. Other stromboli flavors include sausage and pepperoni, and spinach and broccoli.

**Old is New Again**

Long before *burritos* became popular, *tamales* were the choice of snack food, sold by street vendors in Texas and the Southwestern part of the U.S. They were usually handmade and filled with cooked, seasoned and shredded pork, beef or chicken. Certified organic manufacturer Cedarlane Natural Foods Inc. produces an Italian-flavored *tamale* and has placed it in the retail marketplace. The *tamale* is made of spinach and Monterey Jack cheese, topped with pesto sauce.

Another popular food sold on the streets of Texas, the Southwestern part of the U.S. and at most state fairgrounds, is a *churro* (also known as a Spanish donut, the country from where it originated). *Churros* are fried in hot oil (usually lard or a vegetable shortening), until they turn slightly crunchy. They then are sprinkled with a mixture of cinnamon and sugar. Some *churros* are filled with fruit preserves, such as cherry and strawberry flavors, and even chocolate. Rudolph Foods is one of the world's largest suppliers of branded and private-label snack products. It manufactures a 2.5oz bag of cinnamon flavored *churros*, sold in grocery stores across the

**Baozi on the Rise?**

According to Wikipedia, Chinese *baozi*, also known as *bao*, *ba*, *nunu* or *pow*, is a type of steamed bun filled with meat or vegetarian fillings and often seasoned with nutmeg. In China, they are sold at street stalls from large steamers, sometimes with dipping sauces. In the U.S., they can be found at a variety of restaurants serving Asian cuisine. However, a search of Mintel International's GNPD for these names shows no U.S. retail steamed bun introductions from 1997-2005, when the Safeway Select Gourmet Club brand introduced Cha Siu Bao, barbecue-seasoned, steamed "pork buns filled with lean pork and



*baozis* may have a future.

a sweet five-spice hoisin sauce." In 2006, Tasty launched a B.B.Q. Pork Bao. The year 2008 has seen two new product introductions; Okami launched "Asian-Style Steamed Buns," filled with port and barbecue sauce, while The Perfect Bite Co. is offering Kung Bao, Asian Buns with Chicken Sesame. It will be a while before *baozi* vendors match the numbers of those for hot dogs, but for something hot, portable and unique,

— PF Editors

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### Seasonings for Portable Foods in India

Preparation	Ingredients	Use
Garam masala	Cardamom, cinnamon, cloves, black pepper, cumin, coriander	Seasoning blend for samosa and hot meat fillings as spreads like naan bread
Seasoning for sookha aloo (spicy potatoes)	Asafetida, fennel, cumin, black mustard seeds, fenugreek, dried red chiles, turmeric	Filling for potato samosas
Seasoning for sookha keema (spicy ground meat)	Turmeric, garam masala, cilantro, green chiles, garlic, ginger	Filling for spicy meat samosas
Cilantro chutney	Cilantro, green chiles, ginger, salt, lemon juice, sugar	Condiment for samosas and naan bread; also used as an ingredient in side dishes
Mango chutney	Green mangoes, mint, cumin, coriander, red pepper, cloves, nutmeg, ginger powder, sugar	Condiment for samosas and naan bread; also used as an ingredient in side dishes
Tamarind relish	Tamarind, molasses, brown sugar, dates, cumin, garam masala, ginger powder, red pepper	Condiment for samosas and naan bread; also used as an ingredient in side dishes

Source: Gilroy Foods & Flavors, Food & FlavorCast

Grab-n-go foods make for an easy snack or meal, but that does not mean the flavors need to be simple. Note some of the bold flavors in traditional ethnic, hand-held foods.

country. The baked goods are made of wheat flour, canola oil, corn flour, sugar, rice flour, salt, spice, caramel color, cornstarch, flavoring and sucralose. The product is sweetened with sucralose and is trans fat-free.

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### Upscale Sausages

Fabrique Delices has a line of gourmet sausages that can be eaten on a bun or used as an ingredient in a specialty dish. Some of the flavors are Bistro Sausages with *Herbes de Provence*, duck sausage with figs and rabbit sausage with prunes. All of the sausages are made with all-natural meats; they also contain no preservatives, artificial ingredients and nitrites. The company also manufactures a product called Duck Prosciutto that is sold in 2oz packages; the meat is thinly pre-sliced and can be eaten as a snack, right out of the package. The ingredients are duck breast, sea salt, mixed peppercorns, brown sugar, fresh garlic and sodium nitrite.

Nestle, the parent company of Hot Pockets brand stuffed sandwiches, recently introduced a new line of panini sand-

wiches to the marketplace. One of the flavors is a deli-style ham and Swiss cheese on focaccia bread. There is also a new line of Hot Pockets Croissant Crusts that have regional American flavors, such as the Philly Steak & Cheese (beef steak, cheese, green and red peppers, and onions), and Ham and Cheddar.

Nestlé's other brand, Stouffers, has six Bistro Panini Sandwiches, which can be easily eaten on the run. Two popular flavors are the Grilled Chicken Italian Panini (strips of grilled white meat chicken, topped with provolone cheese, grilled onions and green and red peppers, on Italian bread). The other flavor is the Smoked Turkey Club Panini (smoked turkey, bacon and Swiss cheese, on two slices of sourdough bread).



*Wilbert Jones is the president of Healthy Concepts, a food and beverage company that provides menu, recipe and product development consulting services. He has authored four cookbooks, most recently Smothered Southern Foods. He attended Paris' École de Gastronomie Française Ritz-Escoffier and was a food scientist for Kraft General Foods. For more information, call 312-335-0031 or e-mail: wjhealthyconcept@aol.com.*

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