

**Focus on: Tortillas and wraps**

**U**SED TO BE THAT MEXICAN RESTAURANTS were the primary purchasers of tortillas, where they started in everything from burritos to quesadillas, enchiladas, fajitas and soft tacos. That was when tortillas came in two basic varieties: flour and corn. While Mexican concepts are still big customers, these days, any restaurant serving breakfast, appetizers, sandwiches, salads or Southwestern-inspired fare is buying tortillas and other wraps on a regular basis. And the products available range from the authentic flour and corn originals to tomato, spinach, cheddar-jalapeño, garlic-herb, multi-grain and more, in sizes from 4½ inches in diameter to 12 inches.

According to the Tortilla Industry Association, sales of tortillas trail white bread sales by only 2 percent. Part of the reason is a strong interest in Latin foods. But inventive foodservice operators are also taking these wrappers beyond their Hispanic roots to enclose Thai, Italian, Moroccan, Middle Eastern and other global fillings, as well as all-American deli meats, scrambled eggs, barbequed chicken and burgers. Most versatile and in demand is the 10-inch flour tortilla. One of the latest entries is a high fiber tortilla from Olé Mexican Foods. Made from a blend of different wheats, two of these 8-inch tortillas supply the daily requirement for fiber.

In addition to a large assortment of flavors and sizes, operators can choose from frozen, refrigerated and shelf-stable products. Mission Foods, a major supplier, suggests that refrigerated tortillas be stored in the walk-in at 35° to 40°. Both refrigerated and frozen product



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NEW FROM OLÉ MEXICAN FOODS: HIGH FIBER TORTILLAS

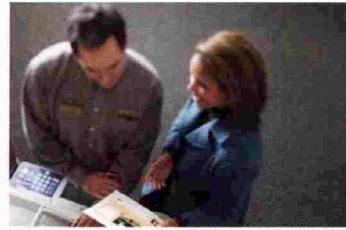
should be brought to room temperature, in their packaging, for 4 to 6 hours before using.

"To offer convenience and versatility to restaurants, we developed a product that's shelf stable," says Edgar Moreno, GM of sales for independent foodser-

vice at Olé Mexican Foods. "These tortillas can be stored at room temperature and don't take up valuable refrigeration space." On their Web site, Mission Foods notes that its tortillas can be stored at room temperature (no higher than 85°) for up to five days, but excessive stacking can cause sticking.

Whatever type of product you choose, there are characteristics that indicate a quality tortilla, Moreno points out. "Practicality is the number one consideration. You don't want the tortilla to stick or fall apart and hold up your line." To evaluate, crumple the tortilla in your hand and straighten it out again. Check if it's still pliable; does it stick or tear? Next, taste the product; it should have a good, "bready" flavor that will complement the filling—not overwhelm it, he says. Bottom line: a tortilla should act as a "foil" in a recipe, whether you're using it for a tuna wrap or Oaxacan enchiladas.

—PATRICIA COBE



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