

# Whole grains make incremental gains

*As guests request more variety, healthful choices, whole-wheat pasta makes inroads*

BY JACK ROBERTIELLO

**W**hile whole-grain breads and brown rice may be growing in importance as dining options, when it comes to whole-grain pasta, slow and steady is the pace.

An increasing number of chain and independent restaurants have been introducing whole-grain, primarily wheat, pastas to their menus. Generally, operators add a single cut, frequently penne or fettuccine, to menus that include many other pasta options, though in some cases, the whole-grain offering is available only upon customer request.

That's OK, says Cynthia Harriman, director of food and nutrition strategies for the Whole Grain Council.

"Generally if a consumer is going to ask for a substitute for whole grain, they'll do it for pasta," she says.

Operators say they're introducing these whole-grain noodles to include more menu choices and to satisfy customer interest in healthier eating.

At Olive Garden, Darden Restaurant's 603-unit Italian-style chain, guests have been able to request any pasta dish that is priced between \$7.25 and \$16.95, depending on daypart and location, with whole-grain linguine for the past 18 months, says director of media relations Steve Coe.

"We had looked at whole-wheat linguine as a way to expand the options we offer on the menu and also as a result of interest from our guests," he says. "Having whole-wheat linguine adds another dimension to the versatility of the menu."

Other chains are providing similar choices. The 90-unit Buca di Beppo offers whole-wheat penne on request, priced from \$8.99 to

\$26.99, as does Romano's Macaroni Grill, for approximately \$8.99. At the 45-unit Pasta Pomodoro chain, multigrain penne is offered for \$7.50 to \$7.95.

At Broomfield, Colo.-based Noodles & Company, approximately 4 percent of guests order the chain's sole whole-wheat entry, whole-grain Tuscan fettuccine, priced between \$5.25 and \$6.95, introduced in 2005.

"We wanted to be able to offer more healthy options for our guests, and we knew that whole grains were becoming more and more popular with the general public as well as our guests," says Krista Koranda, corporate communications manager.

Customers also can substitute the whole-grain fettuccine in any other noodle dish.

According to Nielsen LabelTrends, which tracks manufacturing labeling trends, whole-grain pasta sales in U.S. food, drug and mass merchandiser

stores, excluding Wal-Mart, are on the upswing, says Jennifer Frighetto, director of media relations and external communications for ACNielsen North America.

Frighetto reports whole-grain dry spaghetti grew from a 4.4-percent dollar share of the dry-spaghetti category four years ago to 10.7 percent for the 52-week period ended Aug. 11, with more than \$44.6 million spent in total. That total figure was up 29.2 percent compared with a year ago.

While consumer sales are getting stronger in retail, dissatisfaction with the quality of dried whole-grain pastas had kept some chefs from adding them to their menus.

"There are quite a few whole-grain noodle vendors available and many options, but few vendors met our high standards," Koranda says.

But Roberta Adamo, chef at the Hilton Restaurant Group Penne Restaurant and Wine Bar in Philadelphia, says finding a commercial product she likes well enough to serve her family inspired her to

Adamo is also considering making cavatelli, a hand-rolled flour and ricotta pasta, with whole-wheat flour.

George Powell, chef at North by Northwest Restaurant and Brewery in Austin, Texas, recently added a house-made, whole-wheat fettuccine dish to his menu.

"We were just looking at adding it as an alternative," Powell says. "I love whole-wheat breads and such, so I gave it a try."

Other sheet pasta dishes are house-made at North by Northwest, so Powell set to work on a whole-wheat variety.

"I can't say I've been real pleased by the commercial brands I've tried," he says. "We went with fettuccine because it is still considered a bit upscale, compared to spaghetti and linguine."

The result, served in a light Alfredo sauce with vegetables for \$10.95, has been on the menu for three months and has been popular, he says. Powell is currently experimenting with making other fresh-pasta forms and may soon serve a whole-wheat lasagna dish.

For places where hand-rolled pastas are a feature, whole-wheat flour presents no special issues, Adamo says.

"It's not difficult to work with," she says. "It's a harder wheat, but semolina is hard, too."

She says in the past she might have added unbleached white flour to the mix when making whole-wheat pasta, but the heartier texture seems to be less alien to American palates today.

Selecting the cut of pasta is an issue for most operators. Olive Garden's Coe says the chain's chefs picked whole-wheat linguine over, say, penne, because it pairs better with more sauces.

"The linguine pairs well with the lighter pomodoro sauce as well as with a heavier sauce like Alfredo," he says.

"The whole-grain fettuccine noodle that we chose was the best, highest-quality whole-grain option we could find," says Koranda of Noodles & Co. "We tasted and tested numerous noodles and we chose the best tasting whole-grain noodle with the best texture."

While wheat is the apparent mainstream grain of choice in noodle making, options more often found in ethnic or vegetarian restaurant settings may be making headway. The University Village Center, a retirement village in Tampa, Fla., recently was cited in the Whole Grain Council's Whole Grains Challenge competition for regularly serving buckwheat soba noodle salad. See page 36 for more details about the competition. ■

**The whole-grain Tuscan fettuccine at Noodles & Company is the only whole-wheat entrée at the chain, but customers may substitute the whole-grain pasta into any noodle dish on the menu.**



look beyond the whole-wheat fettuccine with Brussels sprouts, prosciutto and fontina dish she usually adds to her menu in winter. Adamo makes her own pasta, so after experimenting, she decided on a thin-strand, capellini-based dish with a lighter sauce to suit the summer months. It is \$13 at lunch, \$23 at dinner.

"Usually, the weight of the pasta is what's important in relation to the weight of the sauce used," she says.

The thin pasta was served with shrimp in a sauce of fresh tomatoes, garlic, olive oil and fresh herbs. She says her whole-wheat capellini was supple, even though there's a more grainy texture than pasta made with semolina flour. While it was created as a summer item, the popularity of the whole-wheat capellini has led her to consider leaving it on the menu all year.

Customer response has been good.

"A lot of people have been trying for health reasons, I'm sure, as well as for curiosity," she says.



**DISH OF THE WEEK**

# Sweet-and-spicy catfish over seafood jambalaya

*Docks Oyster Bar & Seafood Grill, New York City*

Executive chef Caesar Torres rubs catfish fillets with a mixture of Spanish paprika, salt, granulated garlic, granulated onion, black pepper, ground red pepper, dried oregano, dried thyme and brown sugar. He sears the fish service-side down, flips the fillets and finishes them in the oven.

He browns chorizo in vegetable oil and then adds chopped yellow onion, yellow bell pepper, celery and garlic, plus some of the catfish rub without the sugar.

When the vegetables are soft he adds chicken stock, long-grain white rice, tomatoes concassé, thyme and bay leaf. He cooks the rice for about 10 minutes and then adds medium shrimp, sliced calamari, sea scallops, mussels and small clams. When finished he discards the bay leaves and finishes the mixture with green onions and parsley. He spoons it onto serving plates and tops it with the catfish.



THE CATFISH INSTITUTE

**FOOD & BEVERAGE DIGESTS**

## Virginia Tech wins whole-grains competition

BOSTON — Virginia Tech Dining Services of Blacksburg, Va., is the national grand-prize winner of the Whole Grains Challenge, sponsored by the Whole Grains Council, based here.

Virginia Tech won for the Whole Grain Boot Camp it ran in June and July, which featured two dozen daily specials accompanied by promotional table cards and posters and a bicycle raffle.

The grand-prize winner was in the college/university category. Winners in other categories were as follows:

- Quick service: Jersey Mike's, based in Manasquan, N.J., for offering rolls containing a full serving or more of whole grains.
- Casual/family dining: P.F. Chang's China Bistro and Pei Wei Asian Diner, based in Scottsdale, Ariz., for serving 10 million pounds of brown rice last year, accounting for 45 percent of their rice sales.
- Fine dining: Café Modern at the Modern Art Museum in Fort Worth, Texas, for offering whole-grain offerings such as tabbouleh and wheat-berly salad.
- Lodging/catering: FireLake Grill House at the Radisson Hotel in Minneapolis for putting whole grains at the center of their menu.
- K-12 public schools: Colorado Springs, Colo., School District 11 and Fairfax County Public Schools in Virginia for switching to whole-wheat pizza crusts and hamburger rolls, whole-grain bread, and whole-grain breading for its chicken nuggets.
- K-12 private schools: Flik Independent Schools at Milton Academy in Milton, Mass., and Ross School in East Hampton, N.Y., for items such as whole-wheat phyllo and wheat-berly salad.
- Workplace: Flik/Compass Group at Merck in Boston for daily whole-grain salads as alternatives to fries and chips.
- Health care: HSC Cafeteria at West Virginia University Hospitals for whole grains in items such as paella and chocolate-pecan biscotti.
- Other: University Village Center, a retirement community in Tampa, Fla., for dishes like seafood amaranth and soba noodle salad.



Virginia Tech's quinoa-berly salad

**WHAT'S HOT IN**

## MOBILE, ALA.

### Callaghan's Irish Social Club

916 Charleston St., (251) 433-9374. www.callaghansirishsocialclub.com. Seats: 55. Cuisine: burgers and sandwiches. Specialties: burgers, patty melts, Philly cheese steak sandwiches with choices of slaw, chips, potato salad, cucumber-tomato salad or pasta salad. Main courses: \$7-\$9. Chef: none. Owner: John Thompson.

### Dreamland Bar-B-Que

3314 Old Shell Road, (251) 479-9898. www.dreamlandbbq.com. Seats: 238. Cuisine: barbecue. Specialties: pork sandwich, half-slab of pork ribs, banana pudding. Main courses: \$6.50-\$10. Chef: none. Owner: Betsy McAtee.

### Naman's Market Midtown Cafe

2540 Old Shell Road, (251) 586-0300. www.namansmarket.com. Seats: 99, inside; 30, outside. Cuisine: French-American-Creole-Southern. Specialties: grilled sirloin steak with blackberry glaze; prosciutto and mango-stuffed chicken breast; grilled orange-ginger chicken breast. Main courses: \$6-\$13. Chef: Jeremiah Matthews. Owners: Alec and Thomas Naman.

### Noja

6 N. Jackson St., (251) 433-0377. www.nojmobile.com. Seats: 80. Cuisine: contemporary Gulf Coast inspired by Mediterranean and Asian. Specialties: Muscovy duck breast with Spanish saffron-apricot sauce, grilled lamb chops with fresh Provençal relish and mint oil, fresh fish cooked en papillote and scented with savory Mediterranean vegetables and herbs. Main courses: \$26-\$43. Chef-owner: Chakli Diggs.

### Wintzell's Oyster House

605 Dauphin St., (251) 432-4605. www.wintzellsoysterhouse.com. Seats: 150. Cuisine: seafood. Specialties: gumbo, West Indies salad, bacon-wrapped stuffed shrimp. Main courses: \$11-\$19. Chef: Bob O'Mansky. Owner: Wintzell's Restaurants.

Compiled by Ron Ruggless

## Chef donates poker winnings to autism organization

MASHANTUCKET, CONN. — Franklin Becker, executive chef of Brasserie restaurant in New York City, won the second annual Foxwoods Food & Wine Festival celebrity chef poker tournament, beating out Ming Tsai of Blue Ginger in Wellesley, Mass., and New York-based restaurateur and club owner David Rabin, who took second and third place respectively.



Franklin Becker

Becker's prize, \$15,000, will go to Autism Speaks, which funds research of the condition.

Tsai's \$10,000 winnings will go do the Cam Neely Foundation, which helps cancer patients and their families.

Rabin, who owns Lotus, the Double Seven and Los Dados in New York, won \$5,000, which will go to New York Cares, which mobilizes volunteers for a range of social issues in New York City, and the Innocence Project, which assists prisoners who could be proven innocent through DNA testing.

New York-based chefs David Burke and Harold Dieterle and Boston chef Michael Schlow also participated.

## Chefs on the move

Jason McLeod has been named executive chef and Thierry Delouneaux executive pastry chef of the Grand Del Mar hotel in San Diego, a 249-room resort set to open this month. McLeod most recently was executive chef of the Four Seasons Resort in Great Exuma, Bahamas. Delouneaux comes from The Beverly Hilton in Los Angeles, where he also was executive pastry chef ... Jose Rego was named executive chef of Allegro restaurant, which is slated to open in Atlanta this month. Most recently he was a chef for Not Your Average Joe's, based in Dartmouth, Mass.



Jason McLeod

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