

Chips have, for many years, been seen as a simple side dish or bar snack, but providers of the chopped potato are turning the pizzazz level up to 11 for their latest offerings

EMMA EVERS HAM REPORTS

Chips have been a staple item on pub menus for longer than many can remember, but their role has largely been as the support act to dishes like steak, fish or burgers, as a side for customers to add to their meal, or to order as a simple bar snack.

Now, however, thanks to innovation within the category – both through product development and new serving suggestions – chips are working their way up to headline status on the menu.

“The humble chip is enjoying the focus as an ideal base for creative servings and, as a brand, we are focusing on concepts this year to help operators provide creative menu items using ingredients already in stock,” says Nic Townsend, trade marketer Farm Frites UK & Ireland, which has just launched its Shake Your Fries concept.

With Shake Your Fries, any chip or potato product can be sprinkled with one of three spice rubs – Mumbai Hot, Ibiza Hi and Texas BBQ – which adds a point of difference in a simple way and taps into the personalisation trend, says Townsend.

“The concept is putting excitement back on to the plate with a customised snack that provides operators with an impressive mark-up on their chip offerings,” he adds.

Like other suppliers, Farm Frites is also seeing ‘loaded fries’, also known as ‘dressed up’ or ‘dirty fries’ appear on more menus.

Benefits of loaded fries

This style of serve, where any number of ingredients – from cheese, bacon and pulled pork, to vegan-friendly options like guacamole and pulled jackfruit – are liberally spread over chips, has benefits for both customers and operators and is being widely embraced by both.

“Suitable as a dish in their own right or as a sharer among friends – they



Crunch time



are the perfect menu addition for pub operators looking to increase spend per head,” says Richard Jones, foodservice sales director at McCain Foodservice.

Loaded chips also offer a “great opportunity” for operators looking to use seasonal items to create daily specials, can be served at different parts of the day and are simple to prepare, Townsend maintains.

“Accessorising and topping chips to make appealing snacks and street food-inspired main meals creates a cost-effective and sustainably prepared meal in minutes at no extra cost. It also allows for the full spectrum of health conscious to the indulgent, catering for flexitarian diets,” he adds.

Another benefit of loaded fries is that the core ingredient – the chips – can also be changed to better complement their toppings or provide greater options to customers.

Crowdsourced recipes

Following the launch of its new Sweet Potato Rustics (skin-on, fluffier sweet potato chips) and Crispers (light and crispy potato chips) McCain Foodservice created a collection of 50 crowdsourced recipes in order to inspire chefs when loading their fries.

Examples include Crispers with Chilli, HPA Nacho Cheese Sauce and Sour Cream; Sweet Potato Rustics covered in Aioli Sauce and Smoked Paprika, and the more generous Loaded Buttermilk Fried Chicken Fries Served with Pomegranate Slaw and Buffalo Sauce.

While topped chips are a great way to provide customers with a more substantial choice than an undressed por-

LATTICE EAT MORE
Criss cut fries attract customer attention and increase overall sales

tion, there’s no denying that diners are increasingly choosing healthier options when eating out.

Possessing an array of vitamins and minerals and a lower glycemic index than white potatoes, chips made from sweet potatoes are considered a healthier option by some customers, so adding these to the menu could help operators strike the right balance between indulgence and health.

Sweet potato growth

The statistics point to this being a good idea: according to research by Aviko, Two thirds (66%) of UK consumers think there should be more sweet potato options on menus, with a third believing sweet potato is healthier than white potato, while 30% say they actually prefer the taste.

“The growing appeal of sweet potato demonstrates it is an opportune time for pubs to make the most of this key trend and appeal to a wide group of diners looking for a healthier option,” says Aviko UK & Ireland commercial director Mohammed Essa whose company sells Sweet Potato Fries in its Premium Fries range.

And, as Farm Frites’ Townsend points out, sweet potato fries are still considered a premium product, so operators can command a higher price for them.

“Sweet potato fries are a perceived healthier choice, which are popular with consumers as well as being an expected side order upgrade. For this reason, they are a win-win for operators; a premium upgrade that guests will be willing to pay a little extra for. Our sweet potato fries are longer length, therefore allowing for greater plate coverage. They are also allergen-free to cater for dietary needs.”

Andrea Deutschmanek, Lamb Weston’s country marketing manager UK & ROI, says her company has developed three sweet potato products – Sweet Potato Fries, CrissCuts and Potato ►►

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Puffs – to cover this growing trend.

“In all styles and cuts, they appeal to an ever-expanding audience looking to try something a little different, a little tastier, a little better for you,” she adds.

Encouraging a higher spend

Adding loaded fries and sweet potato chips to menus are great ways to give chips more prominence and encourage a higher spend from customers eating in, but there is another way chips can drive profits for pubs – through delivery.

According to the MCA *Foodservice Delivery Report 2017*, food delivery is growing 10 times faster than the eating-out market, with NPD marking a rise of 73% in the past decade. Last year, the delivery market was worth £4.2m and is only set to rise further this year. Yet, currently only 5% of pubs are offering delivery or takeaway.

Identifying the opportunity for growth in delivery three years ago, Lamb Weston started work on developing fries specifically for this area. Notably, the fries needed to withstand a short journey and arrive at a customer's home as hot and crispy as when they'd left the kitchen.

The result is Hot2Home, frozen fries with an ultra-thin starch coating, which together with patented packaging, allows chips to remain hot and crispy for 20 minutes after leaving the fryer.

“Our research team has been listening to both our customers and their consumers and we know the



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Dipping pots have now become almost compulsory with chips

size of the challenge. The team spent months developing and testing both the fries and the packaging until we knew it would 'deliver'. Lamb Weston's Hot2Home is truly the end to soggy fries,” says Deutschmanek.

Delivery and takeaway

Aviko has also been working on its own delivery and takeaway-friendly product.

Its new Premium Crunch Fast Fries, available in Crunch Shoestring 7mm and Crunch 9.5mm and with a rice flour-based coating, are also designed to stay hotter and crunchier for longer. They also cook in just three minutes.

“No longer do operators need to be concerned with delivering cold or soggy chips,” says Essa. “We have specifically designed the Premium Crunch Fast Food Fries to support pubs in delivering the highest standard of chips possible. With a thicker coating, the new fries are perfect for home delivery packaging and will arrive without any breakage or loss of heat and will also remain satisfyingly crunchy.” ■

Topping chips creates a cost-effective and sustainably prepared meal in minutes

