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## When “Old Is New Again” Artisan Baking Grows

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Guest Editors

Knitting, home brewing, and hand-crafted goods have gained popularity with people who are seeking experiences and products that evoke nostalgia for earlier times. Simple foods, “like grandma used to make,” appeal to these consumers. Perceptions of health and quality surround foods made in small batches using locally sourced ingredients and old-fashioned techniques. Artisan baking, an outgrowth of this trend, is on the rise in local bakeries and grocery stores, particularly in Western industrialized regions.

This issue of *Cereal Foods World* explores the artisan baking trend throughout the value chain, highlighting the challenges and potential solutions for the mass production of artisan breads. Key players from the food industry were invited to contribute their perspectives on artisan baking: from the selection of raw materials to product formulation (e.g., refined versus whole wheat flours), leavening, and finished product evaluation. Their perspectives embrace the “imperfect beauty” of artisan breads, while also exploring technical challenges, such as consistency in dough performance, extending shelf life, and achieving overall quality.

We hope that this issue serves as a conversation starter among bakers and millers. As Jeff Yankellow indicates in his article, “Defining Artisan: What It Is and What It Means,” there is no clear-cut definition of artisan. In a world where there are probably as many definitions for artisan bread as there are bakers, he invites us to join the debate about what is and what isn’t artisan. “Is it the ingredients, the process, the amount of work done by hand or machine, or the bread itself that matters most?”

If flour is the body of artisan baking, leavening is the soul. In two feature articles, the body and soul of artisan baking are examined from technical perspectives. In his article, “Flour Quality and Artisan Bread,” Andrew Ross uses scientific data to dissect the chemical and physical properties of flour and associate these characteristics with the performance of the flour in artisan baking systems. Frank DeVos compares different approaches to integrating once common artisan processes into modern baking environments in “Traditional Versus Modern Leavening Systems.”

Although some might argue that a bread isn’t artisan if it contains enzymes, Dilek Austin argues that bread shape and formulation are more important. In her feature article, “Enzyme Applications in Artisan Bread,” she asserts that enzymes can improve the quality and shelf life of artisan breads and provides technical guidance on how they can be used in artisan baking.

Artisan bread is known for its lack of uniformity from loaf to loaf, which poses challenges in applying the evaluation methods used for mass-produced breads. In his article, “Scoring and Evaluation of Artisan Bread,” Martin Philip offers practical tips and technical guidance on the art and science of “scoring” loaves, using the dual meaning of the word: 1) cutting the surface of the loaf prior to baking; and 2) evaluating the final quality of the baked loaf of bread.

Artisan bakeries tend to be small- to medium-sized companies that reach a smaller number of customers than larger bakeries. As a result, not all of these bakeries have yet faced the pressure to institute the hygienic standards employed by larger corporations. Many bakers are unaware of the regulations mandated by the 2010 Food Safety and Modernization Act (FSMA) or have procrastinated in implementing required FSMA standards. The article by Len Heflich, “FSMA Implications for Artisan Products,” provides useful information for smaller bakers who need to update processes to comply with the new FSMA regulations.

As the artisan baking trend evolves, bakers and cereal scientists will continue to explore a range of opportunities throughout the value chain to adapt old-fashioned baking techniques to modern technology. Along the way they will also grapple with the philosophical and technical question: Can artisan bread be mass produced?

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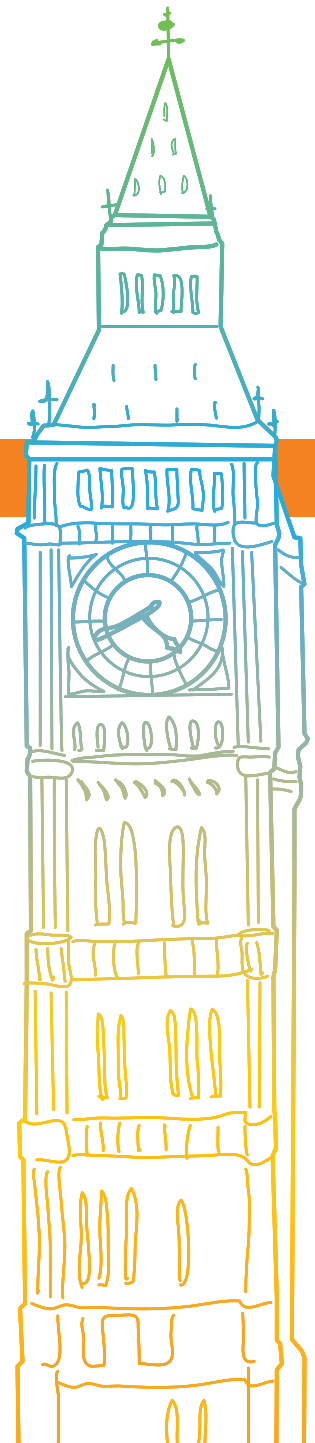
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