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### **Two Fry Controlled Volume Test: A Summary of Research Results**

***A study carried out in foodservice establishments showed that offering two types of fries to customers significantly increased the total volume of fries purchased.***

As specialty frozen potato products such as twisty curls, basket weave, batter coated and skin-on fries have become increasingly popular, one of the U.S.' largest potato processors initiated a research project to determine what impact, if any, the introduction of an additional fry had on a restaurant's overall frozen potato sales. Carried out by an independent research company, the study undertook to quantify this impact and identify operational issues related to offering a multi-fry menu. Additionally, it also attempted to measure the response of restaurant patrons to having a choice of two fry types.

The study was conducted with five commercial foodservice operators in a major U.S. metropolitan area. Participants represented the following type of operations: one hotel/motel restaurant, one fast food outlet, one family restaurant and two theme restaurants. The independent research company worked with these establishments to measure the volume of fry sales during a four-week "control" period preceding the test. The participating establishments then added a second fry to their menu for an eight-week period, again measuring the volume of sales. Sales were tracked for both the regular fry item and the "test" fry item. Test fries included such specialty products as skin-on wedges and skin-on shoestrings.

To ensure a more objective test, the participating establishments' wait staff were instructed not to "push" the purchase of either type of fry among patrons. Participants were supplied with point-of-sale materials, including table tents and menu clips, to build awareness of the choice of two types of fries. To monitor the tests and make sure all operators carried out the study consistently, unannounced check visits were made by the research company staff to each participating operator.

Participating establishments were also provided with customer survey cards to distribute to restaurant patrons ordering fries. These measured satisfaction with the fry products ordered and the anticipated impact that a choice of fry would have on a customer's decision to order fries in the future. Finally, the research firm carried out interviews with each participating operator after the test to gather feedback on operational issues and interest in a two-fry menu.

Data from the sales volume monitoring held important implications for specialty frozen potato products and two-fry menus. Specifically, **the average pounds served per week among the participants was 25% higher when serving two types of fries versus serving one type.** Average sales per week for the "control" period was 653 kilograms. During the test period, average sales per week rose to 819 kilograms.

The test fry accounted for about 24% of sales, with the regular fry item accounting for the remaining 76%. Thus, for every three regular fry items purchased by restaurant patrons, one specialty fry item was also purchased. The drop in sales of the regular fry menu item was minimal, with regular fry sales during the test period averaging 622 kilograms versus the control period's 653 kilograms. The largest increases in total fry sales were seen in the fast food operation and the theme restaurants.

Also, results from 282 customer surveys showed:

- 72% of the customers in full service restaurants indicated they liked having a choice of fries.
- Nearly four out of ten customers indicated they would order fries more often, if they had a choice.

Interviews with the participating operators showed that no major logistical or operational problems existed in regard to menuing two types of fries, although one participant had difficulty due to limited kitchen space. Operators felt that for a two-fry menu to be successful, the two fry types had to be highly differentiated. They also indicated that the key to success of a two-fry menu is "suggestive selling" by the wait staff.

Based upon the findings from the various aspects of the study, it is likely that volume increases during a permanent menu change would exceed the 25% average growth experienced by study participants. This conclusion is based on the fact that store management and wait staff would be more committed to increasing sales in a real-life situation than in a test, and more aggressive selling by the wait staff would result in greater sales. Additionally, several participants experienced start-up delays in the test, which may have impacted their sales levels during the first few weeks of the test. ❖