



There's a new player in the chicken game, delivering from-scratch quality and customization with speed-scratch time savings.

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Up with the Chickens



Disrupting conventions in the crispy,
craveable chicken breast game

By Flavor & The Menu

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There are few items as ubiquitous on American casual, fast-casual and quick-serve foodservice menus as the fried chicken breast. Infused with flavor from marinades, batters, breadings and seasonings and paired with a mind-boggling array of complementary ingredients, crispy, juicy white meat chicken is a favorite across generations and demographics. While new flavor profiles will continue to emerge to pique fresh interest in particular applications, it's hard to imagine there could be any significant change to the hero protein. Surely the category has reached its peak, right? Think again.

"Innovation" has become overly synonymous with "change," thus diminishing its impact to describe a transformation that legitimately changes the game. But with its introduction of the **HORMEL® FLASH 180™ Battered Sous Vide Chicken Breast**, Hormel Foods delivers a righteously innovative product that is poised to reset what's considered table stakes in this all-important menu category.

The HORMEL® FLASH 180™ Battered Sous Vide Chicken Breast is a sous-vide, battered-in-bag, fully cooked, frozen-shipped chicken breast. From thaw, it's finished in the deep fryer in just 2 to 3 minutes, dramatically cutting the fryer time required of both raw and other breaded, fully cooked chicken breast products on the market. The light, homestyle batter provides an optimal coating-to-chicken ratio. The result is craveable chicken with a crispy, crunchy exterior giving way to juicy meat. A chicken breast that goes from fryer to plate in under 3 minutes is revolutionary, delivering on the promise of speed-scratch prep by serving up a menu item that looks, feels and tastes homemade, but requires mere minutes to execute.

Although fried chicken is a new area for Hormel Foods, the company is committed to understanding the preparation needs of today's foodservice kitchens and providing solutions, honing its expertise first in smoked, flame-seared, globally seasoned and marinated meats and now leveraging the advantages of sous-vide cooking. HORMEL® FLASH 180™ Sous Vide Proteins were specifically developed to address key pain points for foodservice operators, says Blake Flores, Hormel Foodservice Innovation Team Lead. "Our goal was to be disruptive when it comes to a fried chicken breast offering."

Using raw chicken is a time- and labor-intensive option rife with food safety considerations. Meanwhile, pre-fried chicken products offer few opportunities for customization and differentiation, and both options take between 7 and 8 minutes of time in the fryer. "We needed to understand how a chicken breast, wet batter and the fry process could all work better together," explains Flores. "We asked, 'What if the chicken is sous-vide-cooked while submersed in the wet batter?' The sous-vide process could cook the chicken, but not activate the leavening agents of the batter. The result is a juicy, delicious, fully cooked chicken breast that is covered in batter and ready for the fryer. It has all the customization advantages of scratch-prep, but without the stress and time."

The HORMEL® FLASH 180™ Battered Sous Vide Chicken Breast also is set apart from other fully cooked chicken breasts by providing operators with the customization advantages they enjoy when breading or battering raw product by hand. The wet batter is a light coating with a mild taste that allows chefs to create signature flavors through use of seasoned flours, breadcrumbs, panko and other ingredients before and after frying. "You're using your own recipes," says Flores. "It's a speed-scratch product you can take credit for."

TIME IS MONEY

Fry time is a crucial consideration for operators. For many restaurants, the fryer is arguably the most in-demand cooking equipment during service, and a chicken breast that takes up to 8 minutes to prepare impacts all the other fried products lined up in the queue. "I don't know what other restaurants are like, but my fryers are completely packed," says Tony Boen, Director of Operations, Grandma's Saloon and Grill, based in Duluth, Minn.

Randy Ehlers, VP of Operations, Water Street Restaurants Group, wasn't seeking an alternative to the hand-breaded raw chicken breast prep used at Charlie's on Prior, a casual concept in Prior Lake, Minn. He simply didn't believe there was a pre-cooked product that could meet his quality expectations. But when persuaded to try the HORMEL® FLASH 180™ Battered Sous Vide Chicken Breast, Ehlers and his team were impressed with its flavor performance after a blind taste test with staff obliterated their skepticism. They also saw "a huge advantage" in its speedy prep for this high-volume operation. "We went from a 6- to 7-minute fry time to a 1- to 2-minute fry," he reports.

While back-of-house efficiency is a key advantage, the value of the HORMEL® FLASH 180™ Battered Sous Vide Chicken Breast is further boosted by its quality. "Sous vide preserves the integrity of the product without overdoing it," says Boen. "It keeps the juices inside the breast. You end up with an absolutely delicious piece of fried chicken." In addition, Flores points out, "The wet batter application ensures the star of the show is the delicious whole-muscle sous vide chicken with just enough batter to satisfy a fried chicken indulgence."

Charlie's on Prior has replaced its hand-prepped-from-raw product with the HORMEL® FLASH 180™ Battered Sous Vide Chicken Breast on three popular items: a fried chicken sandwich, a Nashville Hot chicken sandwich and a crispy chicken salad. In all three applications, staff dredge the breast in panko breading prior to frying—previously a made-to-order step that can now be performed before each shift, well ahead of service, notes Ehlers, adding that they are considering featuring the product for upcoming LTOs in summer and fall.





EASY EXPLORATIONS

The quality and efficiency combo of the HORMEL® FLASH 180™ Battered Sous Vide Chicken Breast presents busy operators with a broad canvas for creative culinary flavor play. The classic fried chicken sandwich is just the start, says Flores. “Any direction you want to go, you can.”

He cites the example of one customer who used crushed-up ice cream cones and corn flakes for the coating and then added some maple syrup for an inventive breakfast item. Another idea? “Maybe you want to use ramen noodles as an additional coating on top of the batter. You couldn’t do that on a product that takes 7 or 8 minutes in the fryer, as the ramen would burn,” says Flores. He also points to the opportunity to leverage the popularity of regional flavors. “In Maryland, you could mix the popular regional seasoning and flour and add that to the batter for a signature taste,” he suggests.

Flores dives deeper into three other versatile applications:

- **Chicken Biscuit With Gravy:** “This is a really comforting dish, especially in the South, and a fairly simple and speedy build. Place the chicken on a biscuit, smother with a sausage gravy and add parsley as a garnish.”
- **Fried Chicken Citrus Salad:** “The delicious white meat chicken works really well on a salad and is an indulgent complement paired with citrus fruit, roasted peppers and a cashew vinaigrette.”
- **Korean Chicken Sandwich:** “This jumps out as an on-trend option. Cover the batter in panko before frying, then build the sandwich, topping the breast with gochujang paste, kimchi, KEWPIE mayo and mini cucumbers.”

PREMIUM SELLS

Providing differentiation in a sea of sameness comes at a premium, but initial customers find the price point for the HORMEL® FLASH 180™ Battered Sous Vide Chicken Breast promises a good return on investment. The product takes the concept of a fully prepared premium protein and mixes that with a fresh, authentic, battered ingredient; two realms of the fried chicken breast world melded together.

“We feel the price we’re paying is a fair one,” says Mike Melby, VP Purchasing, Grandma’s Restaurants. “The savings in the fry time alone is paying for any increase in product cost. And it’s really not a price increase at all, because otherwise you’d be paying it in labor and dissatisfied customers.”

“This is a gamechanger for us,” says Grandma’s Boen. “We’ve been streamlining our menus to get good food out with less labor. I’ve been looking for a chicken that I can serve our guests and be proud of for the last 15 years, without overbearing my fryers, without overworking my staff.” But most important, he notes, is customer satisfaction. During the trial run, Boen says, “Every customer walked out the door with a smile on their face after eating that sandwich. And that’s the value. It’s saving me labor; it’s saving me time and it’s giving me a happy customer.”

Try the HORMEL® FLASH 180™ Battered Sous Vide Chicken Breast for yourself. Visit the [Hormel Foodservice website](#) to learn more about this revolutionary product and request a sample.



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