

Possibilities for a Value-Added Tomato Industry in Casey County, KY: Fried Green Tomato Restaurant Survey

AEC-EXT 2001-15C
November 2001

Matt Ernst¹, Tim Woods² and Tommy Yankey³

Introduction

Casey County, KY, is a significant producer of both tobacco and vegetables. Efforts were under way in 2000 to identify potential value-added activities for existing crops in Casey County. A basic survey of the frozen foods market revealed a potential for a frozen, battered, fried green tomato slice.

An initial survey of 99 panelists at the University of Kentucky on August 30, 2000, indicated greater consumer interest in consuming fried green tomatoes in a restaurant setting. Consequently, this survey of restaurant patrons was conducted in the Bread of Life Café, Liberty, KY, on September 14-15, 2000. This survey was conducted to measure 1) restaurant patron opinion of a frozen fried green tomato slice; 2) consumer willingness to pay for a side dish of two fried green tomato slices; and 3) willingness to pay for a Kentucky grown product.

Methodology

A previous consumer panel indicated that consumers were most willing to purchase fried green tomatoes prepared with two breader recipes: meat/vegetable breader and cornmeal breader. Batter mix and these two breaders were obtained from Blend Pak, a food and baking ingredient company located in Bloomfield, KY.

Slices were prepared, battered, breaded, and flash frozen on August 7, 2000. Slices were removed from the blast freezer after 24 hours and frozen in air-tight containers until the restaurant panel was conducted.

Frozen slices were deep fried in vegetable oil for five minutes and served fresh to Bread of Life Café patrons over a two-day period (September 14-15, 2000). Patrons were offered one fried green tomato slice gratis with their lunch. They were then asked to fill out a short questionnaire.

There were two versions of the questionnaire, reproduced below. The versions differ in that approximately half the panelists for each day were asked to respond to a pricing question for “fried green tomato slices” (Figure 1) while the other half of the panelists were asked to respond to a pricing question for “fried green tomato slices from Kentucky.” All of the 72 patrons asked to evaluate the cornmeal breaded product responded to both questions. Two of the 78 patrons asked to evaluate the meat and vegetable breaded product did not respond to the pricing question.

¹ Extension Associate, University of Kentucky Department of Agricultural Economics

² Extension Associate Professor, University of Kentucky Department of Agricultural Economics

³ Casey County Extension Agent for Agriculture, University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension

Table 1. Overall Rating

	Cornmeal	Meat and Vegetable
Liked Extremely		
Percent	53%	47%
Number of Observations	38	37
Liked		
Percent	42%	49%
Number of Observations	30	38
Indifferent		
Percent	0%	3%
Number of Observations	0	2
Disliked		
Percent	6%	1%
Number of Observations	4	1
Disliked Extremely		
Percent	0%	0%
Number of Observations	0	0

Table 2. Willingness to Pay

	Cornmeal	Meat and Vegetable
Average Price Willing to Pay		
Average Price	\$1.18	\$1.22
Number of Observations	72	76
<i>“side dish of two fried green tomatoes”</i>		
Average Price	\$1.12	\$1.12
Number of Observations	35	39
<i>“side dish of two fried green tomatoes grown in KY”</i>		
Average Price	\$1.23	\$1.29
Number of Observations	37	37

Acknowledgments

Thanks to the following for their support and assistance in this project:

Blend Pak, Inc., Bloomfield, KY

Bread of Life Café, Liberty, KY

John Kotrola, Extension Associate, UK Department of Animal Science

Dr. Benji Mikel, UK Department of Animal Science

Reviewers: Sandra Bastin and Janet Tietyen (FCS); Betty King (Community Development)

University of Kentucky, Department of Agricultural Economics
400 Charles E. Barnhart Bldg., Lexington, KY 40546-0276

Phone: 859-257-5762, Fax: 859-323-1913

<http://www.uky.edu/Ag/AgEcon/>

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