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– Chapter 1 –

On-site Preparation vs. Ready-to-use

Pizza can be made many ways, which makes it unique among foods. At one end of the spectrum is a pizza made totally from ingredients prepared on-site. At the other end is a product assembled from all pre-prepared or ready-to-use components. And then there are pizzas made from both. Before opening a pizzeria you must decide how much ingredient preparation you will do. This chapter examines the various options for creating the crust, sauce, cheese, and toppings — ranging from on-site “scratch” preparation to fully prepared components.

Crust Options

There are five options for creating the crust. In order of complexity they are:

1. Dough prepared from scratch
2. Dough prepared from a mix
3. Frozen dough ball
4. Frozen rolled dough
5. Parbaked or pre-baked crust.

Here are the advantages and drawbacks of each.

Dough From Scratch

Typically, pizza crust is made from yeast dough. It's the most complex aspect of pizza preparation. In its basic form it involves mixing together flour, water, salt, and yeast. Some recipes call for additional ingredients such as sugar, shortening, eggs, and milk. To make consistent quality dough the ingredients must be top quality, measuring must be precise, ingredient temperatures must be right, and mixing must be done for the proper length of time. In addition, dough must be held at the right temperature for fermentation and must be scaled and rounded properly.

ADVANTAGES. Compared to other crust options, mixing from scratch has several advantages. First, you can create your own custom recipe. Second, you can modify and improve the recipe over time. Third, the concept of "mixing from scratch" might be used to a marketing advantage — that is, used to influence the public's perception of your product quality. Fourth, it can result in the lowest food cost per crust. Fifth, some pizza operators feel it gives them the best quality crust.

To a large extent, whether mixing from scratch results in a top quality crust depends on how well the pizzeria owner (or dough-maker) follows proper dough-making procedure. When good procedure is applied, a top quality crust can result; when it's not, quality won't occur.

DRAWBACKS. Mixing dough from scratch has two main drawbacks. First, it requires a certain amount of skill, which means one or more persons must be trained in dough-making. Second, because of the number of steps involved it offers opportunity for mistakes. In addition it requires a mixer, which requires an investment of money and floor space.

In an attempt to minimize the above drawbacks some pizza chains have gone to centralized (or commissary) dough-making. The pros and cons of commissary distribution are discussed in the Commissary vs. On-site Preparation chapter (pg. 409).

Further attempts to eliminate dough-making drawbacks are discussed next.

Dough From a Mix

A mix — sometimes called a pre-mix or pre-blend — combines dry dough ingredients into a bag or box. If the mix comes in a bag that's pre-portioned for a batch of dough the only thing that needs to be measured is water and, sometimes, yeast.

If it's in bulk form (i.e., 50 or 100 lb bags) then the mix must be weighed out first. There are two kinds of mixes: (1) Those containing all ingredients (except water), called *complete* mixes, and (2) those containing some of the dry ingredients (usually everything but flour and/or yeast), called *partial* mixes.

The partial mix is a bag of critical ingredients, or everything but the flour. It comes in bags portioned for one batch of dough. With a partial mix approach a pizzeria purchases flour separately. To make dough, the water is added to the mixer, a bag of partial mix is put in, and flour is scaled and added. The advantage of this approach is that it's usually cheaper than buying a complete mix with flour included.

It's also possible for a pizzeria to make its own mix. For the procedure, refer to the Mix Packet Procedure section of the Dough-making chapter .

ADVANTAGES. The main advantage of a mix over “scratch dough” is that it reduces scaling time and the chance for measuring error. In that regard it could improve crust consistency and quality. But, contrary to what some pizzeria owners hope, mixes don't contain magical ingredients that eliminate the need for proper fermentation, rounding, rolling, and baking methods — all of which are necessary for making a good crust. So a mix does not reduce the need for good managerial and dough-making procedure. For a pizza company that wants to keep its recipe secret, a mix also helps safeguard its dough recipe.

POSSIBLE DRAWBACK. A mix might cost more than making dough from scratch, with a partial mix costing more than a complete mix. However, when labor savings are factored in, using a mix might be as cheap, or even cheaper, than mixing from scratch.

Generally, a mix reduces training time and the chance of human error, which might enhance quality consistency. It also allows a company to keep its dough recipe secret. For these reasons a mix has greatest merit for a company where many people make dough — such as might occur in a chain, or multi-unit business.

Frozen Dough Ball

There are companies that sell frozen dough balls for pizzerias. This crust option eliminates dough-making altogether. However, frozen dough is not problem-free — the balls must be thawed and fermented prior to rolling.

ADVANTAGES. Using frozen dough balls eliminates the need for the scaling, mixing, dividing, rounding, and clean-up involved in dough-making which, in turn, reduces labor time, cost, training and supervision. It also could eliminate the need for investing in a mixer and related equipment. Finally, it reduces the number of ingredients that must be purchased and stored.

DRAWBACKS. Frozen dough costs more than mixing dough from scratch or from a mix. In addition, some pizzeria owners feel that frozen dough doesn't rise or proof up as well as fresh-made dough. It also eliminates the opportunity to create a custom recipe. Finally, it requires a freezer.

Frozen Rolled Dough

There are companies that also sell frozen dough in rolled or sheeted form. With that, the pizzeria owner need only place the frozen rolled dough on a screen or pan to thaw, and then make it into a pizza.

In addition to requiring no mixing, frozen rolled dough also eliminates dough rolling, which eliminates the need for dough-rolling equipment. The drawbacks to the product are the same as for the frozen dough ball.

Parbaked and Pre-baked Crust

The ultimate in crust handling convenience is the parbaked and pre-baked crust — sometimes known as a “shell.”

Parbaked describes a product that's baked to partial doneness. During parbaking the yeast dies, the protein in the flour coagulates, and the starch gelatinizes, or sets, thereby making the product shelf stable. It's unbrowned, so before serving it must be further baked or “finished off” to fully brown the outside. Basically, a parbaked crust is similar in function to a brown-and-serve dinner roll.

Parbaking is accomplished with either an oven or a hot press; thereby resulting in two types of parbaked crust: (1) pan-proofed oven-baked and (2) sheeted press-baked. With a pan-proofed oven-baked crust, the dough is allowed to proof or rise in a pan and then is baked in an oven. The baking occurs at a lower temperature and for a shorter time (around 3 to 4 minutes) than regular pizza baking. With a sheeted press-baked crust, dough pieces are put into a hot press and stamped out. To accomplish this, two hot plates flatten the dough and, at the same time, heat it enough to kill the yeast and gelatinize the starch. Sheeted press-baked crusts are usually dense and thin; pan-proofed oven-baked crusts are

airier and thicker. So press-baked are generally used for thin-crust pizza and oven-baked for thick crust.

A *pre-baked crust* is made by baking proofed dough to full doneness. One common brand is Boboli. This type of product is often marketed as focaccia. Whereas a parbaked crust is white, a pre-baked crust is light brown. It can be eaten without further baking.

ADVANTAGES. There are several advantages of parbaked and pre-baked crust. First, like frozen rolled dough, the parbaked crust requires no scaling, mixing, dividing, rounding, and clean-up — so almost no labor is required and very few errors occur. There's also no proofing required as with frozen dough.

Second, there's no rolling or sheeting involved, which makes for one less thing that pizza-makers must learn. Also, no rolling equipment is required.

Third, because there's no fermentation, as with fresh and frozen dough, crust thickness and degree of proofing is the same from pizza to pizza. In that sense parbaked crust is highly consistent.

Fourth, since it's a firm product it's easy to handle. Unlike dough it can be moved without a pan or screen. It also can be placed directly on a conveyor belt, which can be a handy feature in some operations.

Fifth, because it's partially cooked it results in a shortened bake time by 1 to 3 minutes. In a hot oven a thin-crust parbaked pizza can be finished off in 3 to 4 minutes. For a quick-serve operation, such as a concession stand, this could be an advantage. Generally speaking, parbaked crust pizzas should be baked with more top heat and less bottom heat than a fresh dough pizza.

Sixth, some brands bake up with a crunchy bottom — a feature that some pizzeria owners and customers like. Also, some people feel parbaked crust makes a better (i.e., less soggy) product for microwaving.

DRAWBACKS. The drawbacks of parbaked and pre-baked crust vary from brand to brand. Generally speaking, however, one or more of six limitations can occur. First, because of the shortened bake time the crust interior may not be as hot as a pizza that's baked from raw to done in one step. Interestingly, if the pizza is eaten right after baking, this might not be a drawback. In fact it could be an advantage since the pizza is easier to handle and chew. However, if it's held for a time before serving — as is the case with delivery or carry-out pizza — it tends to result in a colder product than pizza made from fresh dough.