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Image courtesy of Tres Picosos

Authentic Mexican Flavors Gain Ground

Growing demand for convenient, customizable foods creates opportunities to bring traditional flavors across channels and dayparts.

Douglas J. Peckenpaugh
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According to Pew Research, Latin Americans are among the fastest-growing ethnic groups in the US, nearly doubling from 2000 to 2024, from 35 to 68 million, comprising one-in-five Americans. Given that tremendous growth, it's understandable to see concurrent expansion of Mexican foods across the US Over the past few decades, Latin flavors have migrated from areas with strong Mexican populations like Texas, Los Angeles, Phoenix, and Chicago to intertwine with our shared American foodways.

Ethnic population growth influences flavor trends. However, the expansion of Latin American foods across the US has not always preserved traditional, authentic flavors in the process, often favoring "Americanized" takes on the cuisine. As consumer understanding of authentic Mexican flavors expands, food producers have an opportunity to grow market share through cross-cultural flavor preservation.

Innova Market Insights discusses its 2026 Global Flavor Trends through the lens of several flavor-focused variables, including a growing desire for "Sensorial Explorations," including use of toppings, seasonings, and sauces to customize—and personalize—the eating experience. Innova's report also notes the power of merging global and local flavors, along with the marriage of better-for-you and indulgent flavor.

Tres Picosos, a producer of authentic Mexican burritos, aligns well with these trend highlights. The company serves customers like grocery retailers, convenience stores, distributors, and other foodservice partners, offering burritos for any daypart, including breakfast, highlighting ingredient options like birria sauce, chorizo, and chilies. Prepared burritos with options for sides like salsa, hot sauce, sour cream, etc., encourage a high level of customization.

Jane Hartgrove, La Jefa/Owner, Tres Picosos, recently spent some time with *Prepared Foods* to discuss the power behind authenticity in ethnic food trend dissemination across the ever-evolving American foodscape. The following is an abridged

version of this conversation.

Image courtesy of Tres Picosos

Prepared Foods: **How did you come into this specialized segment of the food industry?**

Jane Hartgrove: My husband's family had been in food for a long time. We had a production facility where they were making a variety of prepared foods like salads, sushi, dips, and sandwiches—some for direct store delivery (DSD) and some for convenience.

A convenience retailer came to us, with a burrito in hand, and he said, "These come to my store every day, but I'm not confident of the production process. Would you like to make this burrito for us?" So, we launched Tres Picosos as a direct everyday burrito for convenience stores.

Prepared Foods: **What are some of the breakfast trends you're seeing in the industry, and how does Tres Picosos address those trends?**

Jane Hartgrove: The trend toward convenience foods—prepared foods, handhelds—has been growing for quite some time. As the workforce has evolved, and people are on the road, they need something fast, delicious, and authentic. Previously, the convenience channel didn't have a good reputation for high-quality foods. That has changed dramatically. Customers want something that is fresh, delicious, authentic, and ready to go. Convenience, in particular, has owned the breakfast daypart. We're seeing that change, too, as all categories and dayparts meld into one another. What about the second-shift or third-shift workers who are eating breakfast at midnight or at 5 p.m.? Convenience has a unique ability to serve those segments. Grocery is also getting more into those channels, seeing an opportunity to cover all dayparts.

Retail and foodservice need to compete with authenticity, freshness, and high quality. I always want to trade the customer up. Millennials and Gen X don't want to eat what their parents used to eat.

Today, the beer category growth leader is Modelo, and the salty snack category leader is Takis. We are seeing Mexican culture permeate the US Mexican food is the second most-popular food style in the US It's also very versatile. Customers really like the ability to customize.

Image courtesy of Tres Picosos

Prepared Foods: **How can we build on this momentum? What comes next?**

Jane Hartgrove: The way to differentiate is to have the right product mix for when your customers are eating. We have our burritos packaged three different ways, because we want to meet the retailer or foodservice operator where they meet their customer. We have a very authentic aluminum-foil-wrapped burrito. Everybody understands it's hot. We also have dual-ovenable clear film, meant for a coffee chain or anybody who needs to do speedy service—30 seconds later, they can put it in their own sleeve, a branded sleeve, and hand it to the customer with their latte, ready to go. And then we have packaging fully branded for retail, the Tres Picosos packaging, which has a very colorful, bright design. The flavors are called out by color. And the protein is also listed on the front of the package as a callout, because we're finding that people are more interested in protein across all dayparts.

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