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CHOPS U.S. PORK

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HPAI PREVENTION

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ALT-MEAT SKEPTICISM

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Fine brine

TRADER JOE'S buttermilk-brined half chicken continues the grocer's tradition of quality.

PRODUCT:

Trader Joe's
Buttermilk-Brined
Half Chicken

PRICE:

\$4.99 per pound

PLUS:

A convenient,
delicious, natural
chicken product

PROBLEM:

Smaller portion.
subtle flavors



Photo by Getty

Trader Joe's is known for its loyal shoppers who seem to have love affairs with many of their products. We recently learned of their refrigerated buttermilk-brined half chicken, which “comes already marinated in a brine of buttermilk, salt, vinegar powder and rosemary extract, and is ready to be cooked straight from the package.” The half chicken is meant to serve two people, and is all natural and antibiotic-free. Our tasters were eager to try this fresh, ready-to-cook bone-in chicken, so let's hear what they had to say about this new TJ's item.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Our tasters, teenagers and up, included some Trader Joe's shoppers, along with those who shop at other grocers more often but occasionally frequent TJ's.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS & APPEARANCE

Tasters were impressed with the appearance and packaging of the buttermilk chicken.

“I like the packaging because it's shrink-wrapped, so I can drop it in the freezer/fridge and no air will get in,” one taster said.

Another taster added that they liked the “all natural” labeling on the package, while another was “excited” to try the chicken, given their enjoyment of Trader Joe's food.

Tasters were also favorable of how the chicken cooked. One commented on the “nice golden color” of the chicken when grilled, and another appreciated the “perfect size” of the chicken for dinner portioning. One more taster shared, “It looked small and flat, like a spatchcocked chicken flat; but as I was grilling, it plumped up.”

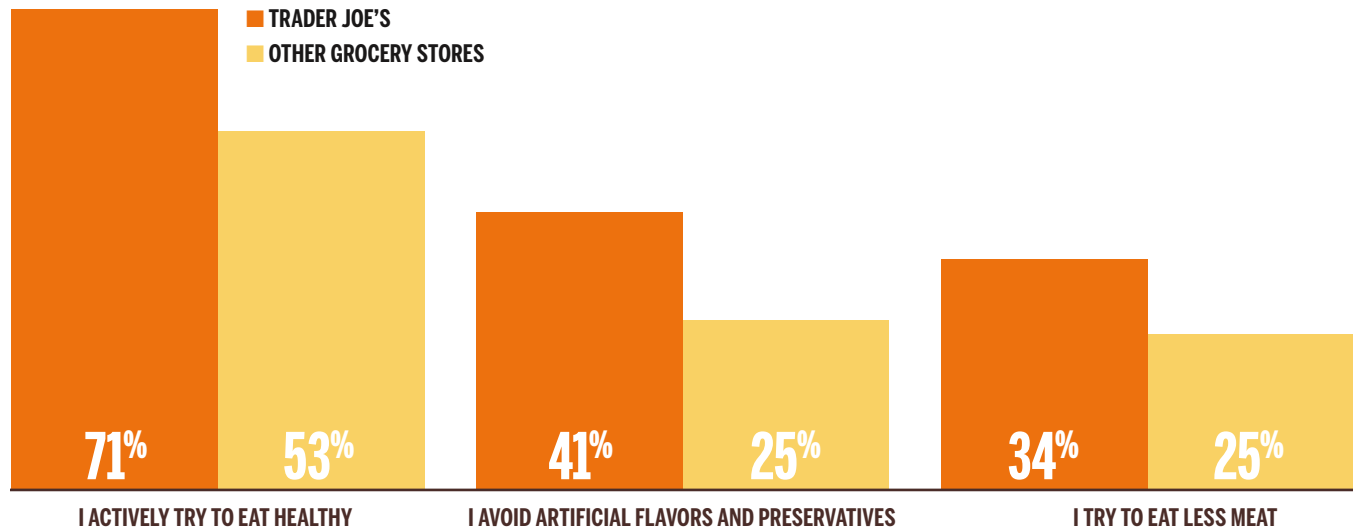
TASTE, TEXTURE AND MORE

Tasters were overwhelmingly positive in their assessment of the Trader Joe's buttermilk-brined half chicken.

“We really enjoyed it!” one taster said. “My husband cooked it on the grill, and it turned out delicious! The chicken was very moist. I was

HEALTH CONSCIOUS

Trader Joe's shoppers are unique in how healthy habits inform their grocery buying. According to a Statista survey, TJ's customers are far more likely to eat healthy, avoid preservatives/artificial flavors, and reduce meat consumption when compared with customers of other grocery chains.



Source: Statista Global Consumer Survey, May 2022

“IT WAS ONE OF THE BEST PRE-MARINATED ITEMS I’VE EVER HAD.”

concerned it would be dry, but it was perfect!”

“The skin was so crispy, almost like it was air-fried or baked in a very hot oven,” another taster shared, after grilling the chicken. “The meat was tender and moist. It was one of the best pre-marinated items I’ve ever had.”

A third taster was especially pleased with the marinade ingredients. “I prefer to marinate my own meat, to stay away from artificial additions,” they began. “The overall flavor was great, not too salty, not too sour/briny. We couldn’t detect any flavor or seasoning specifically, then I saw it was a very simple ingredient listing — nothing artificial, no preservatives, etc., which made us even more pleased with this chicken.”

Other phrases that tasters shared included “Tons of juice and perfectly cooked,” “It’s healthy and provides a more upscale meal,” “It coked in no time to sheer perfection!”, and “It was delicious — moist, tasty, and it feel off the bone; there wasn’t a shred of meat left.”

If there were any detractors, it involved the chicken’s seasonings.

“There wasn’t much flavor in the chicken, which was disappointing,” a taster said. “We’re

used to store-bought rotisserie chickens that are injected with all kinds of salt and flavors, so they’re succulent.”

Similarly, other tasters stated, “I’m not sure what the buttermilk did,” and “This was disappointingly flavorless. It was meaty, but no flavor.”

Other tasters, though, appreciated the marinade more for the juiciness it gave the chicken, and less its seasoning. One taster stated, “The seasonings were very subtle, but we could definitely taste that it had flavor and wasn’t plain chicken. The skin had a nice crispness too.”

And finally, a taster appreciated the versatility of the dish. “I primarily ate the white meat portions, but tried the dark meat and it was also very good,” they said. “The parts I didn’t finish, my wife used to make a chicken salad sandwich, which she thought was incredible.”

UPSHOT

In assessing their future with the product, our tasters offered some very interesting, thoughtful responses.

For a good number of tasters, there was no doubt they would buy the product again.

"I don't frequent Trader Joe's, but I would definitely pick this up," one taster said. Another added, "The price point is good. I would definitely buy this chicken again," and another still said

"MY HUSBAND COOKED IT ON THE GRILL, AND IT TURNED OUT DELICIOUS!"

"I would buy again for grilling. The price/lb. was reasonable, considering all of the work is done for me."

That taster's latter point, involving the dish's simplicity, was a recurring

theme among other the tasters.

"This is pure perfection as far as easy and delicious meals go," a taster said. "I will buy it again, and it was a decent price."

Another taster added, "The whole point in me buying something like this is to make an easy meal. I don't have to do anything to it — it's ready to go. We couldn't stop eating it and will 100% be buying this again!"

And a third remarked that the brine makes the chicken "awesome as a base for fried chicken! I could have brined chicken ready-to-fry vs. brining it myself."

Some tasters, though, pondered the chicken's portions and flavor.

"A hungry person could eat the entire package — one package may be too small for two average eaters," a taster said. "If we made again, we would dress it up with more seasonings and spices."

"At this price point," a second taster shared, "especially in today's economic environment, we're not sure it will become a staple in our home."

And finally, a taster marinated on the chicken's subtle flavors.

"If buying a tampered-with product, it should have more seasoning," they began. "However, I'm more likely to buy a neutral thing like this vs. something with herbs, etc., because the flavors are never right. So, it's a conundrum for me."

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CONCLUSION

It seems the majority of our discerning tasters were pleasantly surprised with Trader Joe's Buttermilk Brined Half Chicken, specifically liking its moistness and tenderness, especially when grilled, which provided a crispier chicken. Several found the chicken to be lower in seasoning/flavor than they would expect from a "marinated" chicken. Most did not understand the role of the buttermilk for tenderization, but still recog-

nized the product was tender. TJ's website does suggest "sprinkling it with TJ's Ranch Seasoning Blend", but perhaps they should suggest that and/or other seasonings right on the package. We know convenience has a price, and, for our more price-sensitive tasters, the price for this pre-marinated chicken was too much given the portion size. Overall, this could be one of those Trader Joe's products that their loyal shoppers, and others, will continue to purchase.

"THIS IS PURE PERFECTION AS FAR AS EASY AND DELICIOUS MEALS GO."

by **Jacqueline Beckley, The Understanding & Insight Group, and Anna Marie Cesario and Jennifer Vahalik, U&I Collaboration LLC.**

Food product development and consumer research veterans, Jacqueline Beckley, Anna Marie Cesario and Jennifer Vahalik, join Meatingplace Magazine as regular contributors to MeatingTaste, a consumer sampling of new products featured in our monthly Taste Test column. Here's how the program works: The meat item is distributed to consumers, including the core demographic, for preparation in their own houses. No instructions are provided to the consumer, other than to write their overall impressions of the product, as well as to evaluate the flavor, texture, packaging and ease of use. Beckley, Cesario and Vahalik look for common threads by using Getting It!®, a system developed to listen to consumers about products. The sample of people is not intended to be a 'taste test' in a controlled setting, nor is it intended to simulate a focus group. Others are doing both. Rather, the intent is to interpret the response of the people who might purchase a product like this and use it, simply based on their encounters with the product in their individual, unique home environment. That is how U&I has been developing cutting-edge product and people understanding since 1999.

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