

P.26 THE MANY IMPACTS
OF 'ONE TYSON'

P.43 PROP 12 MAKES
EARLY IMPRESSION

P.54 IN'T VELD TOASTS
THE TOWN

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LEVEL HEAD

In his second tenure as agriculture secretary, **Tom Vilsack** looks to level the meat processing playing field



This little piggy went home

WHICH ROJO'S PANCAKE SANDWICH EARNED A PLACE IN TASTERS' FREEZERS?

Photo by Getty

PRODUCT

Rojo's Famous Pancake Sandwich:

Pork Sausage "Pig in a Blanket"; Pork Sausage, Scrambled Egg & Cheddar Cheese

PRICE

\$6.98/4 sandwiches

PLUS

A convenient, affordable option for **breakfast**

PROBLEM

Inconsistent textures and flavors

Breakfast sandwiches are one of the top selections consumed in the heavily competitive breakfast category. In-home options compete with QSR and even Grubhub as people look for convenient, tasty, and affordable fuel to start their day. As inflation forces more people to tighten their spending, many are opting for grocery store breakfast solutions.

Rojo's Famous Pancake Sandwich is one frozen option that can be ready in less than 90 seconds. Available in two varieties — pork sausage "pig in a blanket" and pork sausage, scrambled egg and cheddar cheese — we let our taste testers decide which frozen handheld breakfast sandwich they wanted to try. We were anxious to hear what our tasters had to say about these frozen pancake sandwiches. Do they help make their morning routines more convenient, and get their day off to a good, tasty start?

DEMOGRAPHICS

The Rojo's Pancake Sandwich tasters included high schoolers and up, with each (family) selecting the Pancake Sandwich they preferred, with some trying both.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS AND APPEARANCE

Quite a few of our tasters zeroed in on the sandwiches' preparation instructions, and how dramatically they varied between the microwave (which requires only 90 seconds) and the oven, which requires a full 30 minutes of baking.

"My gut is telling me it will be better baked in the oven versus the microwave, but who has 30 minutes in the morning to wait for this to cook, and also preheat the oven?!" one taster asked.

Another taster remarked, "We didn't try the microwave option because we don't like using microwaves, [and were] surprised it had to cook for 30 minutes. Wish it was a shorter cooking time." And a third asked, "Thirty minutes vs 90 seconds ... who would wait 30 minutes (plus pre-heat time) on a weekday morning for breakfast?"

Other tasters commented on a couple recurring issues in these Taste Tests: One, what to do with the product packaging during cooking; and two, how the food itself compares/contrasts with the packaging photography.

"I didn't understand the microwave directions," a taster explained. "It says 'Place wrapped frozen sandwich in oven.' Does 'wrapped' mean

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keep it in the plastic it came in, or do I have to wrap it?"

And on the topic of appearance, a taster shared: "Both pictures on the front of the boxes don't look like the actual product. The crimped edges in the picture look like a pastry, not a pancake, and the sausage inside looks minced, not like the patty that it is."

TASTE, TEXTURE AND MORE

Our tasters who tried the "pig in a blanket" option provided some very strong opinions.

For some, the pancake texture left much to be desired when heated in the microwave. "The breading was terrible," one taster said. "It wasn't crispy; it was like mush." A second taster stated, "The pancake is wet and soggy, and the sausage seemed soggy with no bite. It's tolerable, but poor texture."

One taster utilized both microwave and oven, but was ultimately underwhelmed: "Two totally different sausage products based on prep method. Which one is correct? The pancake was inedible when microwaved, and marginal in the counter-top oven. Either way, it doesn't look anything like the front of the package."

Another taster experimented a bit with the preparation, and ended up quite pleased with the end result: "It was a little soggy, but firmed up as I let it sit a few minutes. The taste was good. The

sausage wasn't overpowering, and the amount stuffed into the pancake was great."

And while one taster found the oven-baked pancake "a little dry," a taster who air-fried the product said, "They came out great — nice and crispy on the outside, but soft on the inside. My son decided to dip them in maple syrup and really enjoyed them this way."

For the tasters who sampled the "pork sausage, scrambled egg and cheddar cheese" variety, there was a similar divergence of opinion, although the reasons were different.

Some tasters were positive in their assessment. "They were better than expected!" one said. "Though admittedly, my expectations were very low ... The price isn't terrible if you needed something quick for the kids before school."

Another commenter shared, "I preferred this one of the two. It tastes really good, like a traditional breakfast sandwich, with the right amount of cheese so it's not as dry."

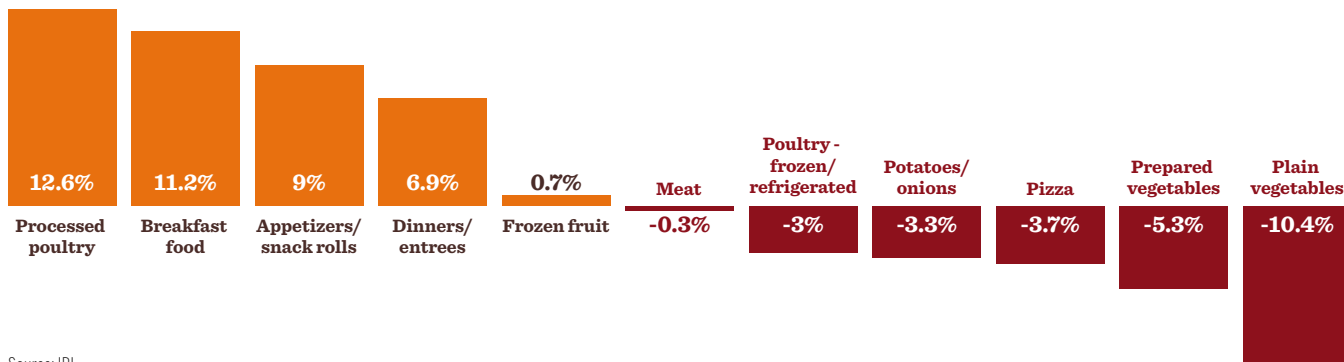
However, some tasters still encountered texture problems. One taster, who microwaved the sandwich, said it was "hot, but the inside was rock-solid frozen. I put it back in for another 35 seconds, and now there's cheese everywhere."

And with this sandwich having three fillings — sausage, eggs, and cheese — some tasters were not fans of how the flavors coalesced.

"The inside had definitive sausage and cheese,

FROZEN OPPORTUNITIES

The frozen breakfast foods category grew significantly in 2021, with only processed poultry seeing more growth. Meanwhile, frozen mainstays like pizza and vegetables saw declines.



Source: IRI

but the egg was almost nonexistent,” one taster said, with another adding, “The eggs were rubbery and barely there, and didn’t taste like eggs. No flavor. The cheese tasted fake.”

A third taster shared, “It’s definitely breakfast sausage, but I think the sausage overpowers the pancake. I don’t taste pancake. It smells like it wants to be a pancake, but when you taste it, it’s straight up sausage, which isn’t bad.”

UPSHOT

In their overall assessments, some tasters were clear that they would buy the Rojo’s pancake sandwich again.

One taster “liked that there wasn’t egg involved [in the pigs in a blanket variety], because sometimes the frozen egg taste can throw off a sandwich like this.” Another taster liked the competitive price, and that “they do not have artificial ingredients.”



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One taster offered an interesting critique of the product’s portability: “If it was in a cardboard thing that you could take with you on-the-go, then I would definitely eat this on the way out of the house/in the car. They’re not bad. It’s got good flavor. It’s just a classic breakfast sandwich in a pancake.”

A couple other tasters found the sandwiches did not compare favorably to other breakfast options.

The first stated, “I enjoyed them overall, but wouldn’t buy them. We generally only buy frozen waffles, and those take five minutes to cook in the toaster.”

The second liked the sandwiches’ taste, but concluded that “getting a fresh breakfast sandwich from a bagel shop would be better.”

Another taster was definitive, concluding that “Neither is a great way to start your day. They’re not tasty, have poor nutritional and they don’t look, taste, or eat like a pancake.”

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CONCLUSION

Between in-home and out-of-home options, there's such fierce competition for the breakfast meal that a contender must not only taste good, but also provide good value, satisfaction and sustenance. Given the economic environment, many people are trading brands based on pricing. With Rojo's pancake sandwiches priced about \$1 less than the market leader, they are primed for trial.

However, hearing the mixed comments from our evaluators, the product must improve for it to be a regular breakfast experience. They

can start with more realistic product images (especially of the sausage component) on the front of the packages. The image did not reflect the sausage patty. The breakfast-style sausage was the highlight for both varieties. There's clearly opportunity to provide a better texture and flavor after prep for the pancake and the egg to garner repeat purchases and become part of one's morning routine.

Those improvements and others can help Rojo's pancake sandwiches remain an option in the breakfast freezer case in areas not familiar with the "famous" component of the product.

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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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