



# 'Fantasy bread'

**P**ita is far and away the most popular kind of bread in Iran. But especially in the middle class, interest in western baking traditions is growing. Entering this segment can be an interesting opportunity for Iranian bakeries, since the so called “fantasy breads” are not subject to state price controls, unlike subsidized pita bread.

Warm and fresh, direct from the street baker – that’s how Iranians like their pita.

“Nan” is the most eaten food in Iran. It’s basic to the Iranian diet and is part of every meal. There are different versions in different regions, the most familiar being Sangak, Barbari, Taftoon and Lavash.

Bread isn’t baked ahead of time but only as needed, so customers don’t have a problem with standing in line at their favorite bakery. After all, freshness is the first priority.

The baking business is still very much an artisanal affair – about 60,000 small bakeries supply Iranians with pita just in time, from early in the morning to late at night.

The flour they use is grown largely in Iran, due to government policies aimed at reducing imports and promoting self-reliance. That’s an ambitious goal in view of the high demand for flour. At 150 kg per capita, Iran has an unusu-

by Lutz Popper and Christof Schricke

## Iranian consumers getting a taste for western bread specialties

ally high rate of wheat consumption.

The Iranian government does not leave pita prices to the free market, but instead subsidizes it to make sure that it is affordable to all. For bakeries, that means that they must adhere to narrow pricing restrictions.

To get around these restrictions, some bakeries are going in new directions and catering to the demand of the growing middle class for so-called fantasy breads, meaning breads that look and taste more like European products. There are no government price controls for these breads.

### PROBLEMS IN PRODUCTION

But most bakers don’t find the switch to be entirely without problems.

One difficulty is presented by the nature of Iranian wheat

flour. Its protein content and gluten quality are often not up to the demands of western-style bread making.

By comparison with nan, for example, white bread in loaves requires flour with high volume formation, high water absorption and high gas retention. Western breads also need a soft, even crumb.

**FLOUR TREATMENT GAINING IN IMPORTANCE**

Until recently, flour standardization and improvement were non-issues in Iran. The artisan bakers used their decades of skill and experience to manually compensate for fluctuations in raw materials and harvest quality. But for fantasy bread bakeries, with their higher level of mechanization and much broader product range, flour treatment can be essential to success. Highly specific functional compounds can improve the qualities of flour to such an extent that even locally grown wheat can be used to turn out crisp baguettes, soft hamburger buns and moist grain breads.

Currently the trend with Iranian consumers is toward slightly rustic baked goods, enriched with selected color and flavor malts to get a characteristic appearance and flavorful taste.

The following is a typical recipe for rustic wheat dough, as

might be modified in various ways by adding grains, seeds, whole grain or rye flour to get a wide assortment of products.

Typical recipe for rustic wheat dough	
Wheat flour	10,000 g
TopBake Rustikal 2%	200 g
Salt	200 g
Yeast (instant)	150 g
Water	5,800 g
Total dough	16,350 g

- Kneading time                    2 minutes slow/6 minutes fast
- Standing time                    10 minutes
- Per loaf                            600 grams
- Intermediate rising time    3 minutes
- Rising conditions              32 degrees C / 82% humidity
- Rising time                        about 45 minutes
- Baking temperature          230 degrees C
- Baking time                       30 minutes


In addition to the trend to fantasy breads, Euromonitor International predicts that in the coming years Iran will

Problem	Cause	Solution
Dough soft, wet, shiny surface	Excessive kneading time	Reduce kneading time
Dough tears when making loaves	Standing time too short, gluten too stiff	Extend standing time, add dough softeners (EMCEsoft P10)
Dough gets softer during working, loaves come out very flat	Possible insect damage	Add 0.2% EMCEbest Bug Stop
Insufficient rise stability	Not enough oxidant (ascorbic acid)	Add 20-60 ppm Elco P-100 K
Loaves too flat	Final rising time too long, gluten too soft, insufficient oxidation	Shorten final rising time, add Elco P-100 K and/or Alphamalt Gloxy 5080
Loaves too round (usually also not enough volume)	Final rising time too short, too little yeast, dough too firm	Extend final rising time, add yeast, keep dough softer
Surface too dull	Too little or no fuming	Add fuming
Crumb too hard and dry	Too little enzyme activity	Add Betamalt 25 FBD

see a shift from unpackaged artisanal bread to packaged industrially-produced bread.

This means that freshness retention and machine workability will become issues that require raw-material based solutions.

In addition, Iranian wheat farmers frequently have to deal with insect infestation. There are effective flour treatments that can help limit the quality problems caused by pests.

The above chart shows a survey of common product problems and possible remedies. 

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