



ALGERIA'S love affair with baguettes

by Martina Mollenhauer and Fabien Varagnac

Estimates show around 49 million are sold in the country every day

Algerians love French baguettes more than any other nation. Although couscous and flat bread are also part of the daily diet, the unchallenged leader in the field of wheat products in the largest country in Africa is baguette à la française.

If statistical projections are to be believed, 49 million baguettes pass over the shop counter every day. That would mean each of the 38 million Algerians eats, on average, more than one whole loaf of this white bread every day. Compared with these quantities, consumption in France is significantly lower, as the French are estimated to eat less than one baguette a day.

In Algeria, bread is bought from the artisan baker around the corner. Industrial products have no appreciable significance in the Algerian market. At present, the country has only one bakery producing on an industrial scale. According to estimates by the market intelligence firm “Euromonitor International,” the predominance of the artisan bakers will continue for a long time. According to a recent market survey, there is currently no sign of their being ousted by industrial bakeries as they have been in many other countries.

GOVERNMENT BUYS WHEAT

Because of the extremely high annual wheat demand of about 193 kg per head of the population, Algeria is one of the world’s biggest wheat importers. A large percentage of the wheat is procured from France, but the Ukraine and other eastern European trading partners are playing an increasing role.

For the country’s mills it is not always easy to produce flour in baguette quality. Wheat products are subsidized in Algeria, and the state reserves the right to control imports of the raw materials. Imports are regulated chiefly by the government organization Office Algérien Interprofessionnel des Céréales (OAIC).

Since quality is not necessarily the main objective of this procurement policy, it is essential for the country’s mills to enhance and standardize the baking properties of their wheat lots with suitable flour improvers.

The basic treatment usually consists of ascorbic acid and enzymes such as alpha- and beta-amylase. For treating baguette flour, the mills now have special enzyme systems at their disposal, such as Powerzym Glut-X.

CHARACTERISTICS OF ALGERIAN BAGUETTES

Although bakery products are government-subsidized in Algeria and sold at very reasonable prices, consumers nevertheless have quality expectations and know exactly how they want their favorite bread to be, demanding a large proportion of crisp, flaky crust, a fluffy, succulent crumb and a characteristic flavor.

However, the bread is lighter than the original French product and has a larger volume. Whereas the weight per baguette is only about 250 grams in Algeria, the average weight in France is around 350 grams.

The appearance is different, too. Unlike their French colleagues, Algerian bakers aren’t as precise about making incisions in the fermented dough portions. The direction of the cuts is not always uniform; in many cases the pattern is random.

Here is a typical basic recipe for baguettes:

- 100 kg flour
- 1.8% salt
- 0.5% instant yeast
- 56-58% water.

PREPARATION IS A MATTER OF INSTINCT

The elaborate formation of sponge doughs and the use of

wheat sour – which is still fairly common in France – are not the practice at Algerian bakeries. The doughs are prepared by a direct process.

In order to achieve the characteristic attributes of a French baguette, great care is put into the dough-making process. One important feature is the comparatively large amount of water added. Algeria's artisan bakers know how to handle wet doughs, and they keep them soft in order to create the typical dough structure. They keep the kneading process gentle to avoid destroying the sensitive gas bubbles and the thin walls of the pores. Rounding and molding are carried out with as little pressure as possible in order to protect the dough structure and permit the strong leavening typical of the product.

To achieve a distinctive shred, deep oblique cuts are made in the dough portions before baking. And the ideal way

to create a crisp, flaky crust is to place the dough directly on the hearth of the oven and bake it at a high starting temperature (up to 250 degrees C), adding plenty of steam.

It is true to say that the production of baguettes requires more experience and instinct than that of flat bread or pan loaves. Since problems of quality occur repeatedly in practice, the following is an overview of the most common defects in products and possible ways of avoiding them:

Problem: low volume

Solution: increase fermentation time; use a blend of amylase/hemicellulase: Powerzym 6000.

Problem: poor stability

Solution: decrease fermentation time, increase mixing time; decrease amylase: Alphamalt VC 5000; increase ascorbic acid: ELCO P-100K.

Problem: not enough opening of the cuts (bloom)

Solution: increase mixing time, increase first resting time; increase ascorbic acid: ELCO P-100K.

Problem: uneven crumb structure

Solution: increase mixing time, decrease first resting time; increase ascorbic acid: ELCO P-100K; use gluten: EMCEvit C.

Problem: lack of crustiness

Solution: increase baking time; increase amylase: Alphamalt VC 5000. **WG**

If you have any questions, please approach Martina Mollenhauer, product manager at Mühlenchemie. She can be contacted at mmollenhauer@muehlenchemie.de.

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