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- Survey: Households Cut Back on Foods as Costs of Basic Necessities Rise
PAGE 6
- Healthier Generation, Campbell's Honored For Full Futures School Nutrition Program
PAGE 8
- Toast Launches Unified Platform Drive-Thru Solution for Quick-Service Restaurants
PAGE 9
- Patriotic Branding Helps Companies Celebrate Nation's 250th
PAGE 10
- Maple, Quantic Bring Automated AI Phone Ordering to Restaurants
PAGE 12

Rudolph Foods Goes Whole-Hog On Pork Rind Pellets for Foodservice

BY A.J. FLICK

There was a time when Tim Byers, James Beard Award-winning chef, author, culinary diplomat and restaurateur, gave little more than a passing thought to pork rinds.

"Anybody doing that nose-to-tail, use-the-whole-animal kind of cooking is going to think about it," Byers said. "We were buying whole pigs, doing whole-hog barbecue, making sausages, curing hams and bacon.

"I understood meat processing and how to make traditional pork rinds and cracklings on my own, but it's an art and it's a long process. There's only so much

skin on an animal, too."

Little did he know one lunch would change all that.

Enter Mark Singleton, officially known as vice president of sales and marketing at Texas-based Rudolph Foods, maker of Southern Recipe Small Batch Pork Rinds. Unofficially, Singleton is a veritable ambassador of pork rinds.

Singleton literally entered Byers' restaurant for lunch one day and started a conversation that led to present day, when Rudolph Foods hired Byers as for flavor innovation and as a spokesman to the foodservice industry.

"We started talking about how difficult it is to make chicharrón from scratch," Byers recalled, "dehydrating the skins and doing all the work it takes. It took three days."

Singleton offered to bring Rudolph Foods' pork rind pellets over, which they tossed into a fryer.

"A minute later, we had fresh cracklings," Byers said. "We seasoned them up, put them with a dip and within five minutes in the kitchen, we had an appetizer at the bar," he said.

"That was fun, and it kind of

Continued on PAGE 14

Report: Online Grocery Sales Power Growth

FMI—The Food Industry Association and NielsenIQ find that grocery shopping is no longer a choice between store and screen, but instead a seamless blend of both in the latest Digital Engagement Transforms Grocery Shopping 2026 report. With omnichannel behaviors as the new normal, total U.S. online grocery sales will reach \$452 billion by 2028, making ecommerce a primary engine of grocery progress.

The report finds that ecommerce now drives nearly three-quarters of total grocery dollar growth. In 2025 alone, online

Rudolph Foods

Continued from PAGE 1

sparked everything. That was maybe 15 years ago, so it's interesting to now be in the position of telling that story," Byers said.

As a restaurateur, Byers was impressed that the pellets are shelf-stable.

"It's basically pork and salt, rendered and dehydrated into a skin cut that goes from shelf-stable to a fresh food product in about a minute. You drop it in the fryer and a minute to a minute and a half later, you've got fresh pork rinds.

"What's exciting is that it's a win-win for the restaurant operator," he said. "It's easy to store, doesn't need refrigeration, comes in reasonable pack sizes and the margins are great.

"You get a fresh product quickly without heavy-duty training. It wins on food cost, labor cost and inventory durability. It's really great for the end user."

Byers has spent his career looking at food from a cultural, global perspective. He calls himself an "anthropologist at heart," which has even led him to cuisine diplomacy with the U.S. Department of State.

"I've been in restaurants for about 30 years, from high-end international work and luxury hotels to my own restaurants, from fine dining to fast casual," he said. "At the core, food is about sharing. For me, the table is where storytelling happens.

"I love meeting people and exchanging ideas. When I worked with the State Department on the chef corps and culinary diplomacy work, that's what it was about

— using food as a way to connect.

"America has this melting-pot food story and when you travel, you see how deeply food is rooted in culture and history," Byers said. "I've worked in places like Kyrgyzstan with indigenous Mongolian communities, and it all comes back to where food comes from, how it got here, and where it's going."

"That's the 'amateur anthropologist' side of me. I love the foodways, and I love how different cultures contribute to what we eat in America," he said.

Based in Dallas, the husband, father of three and his dog's best friend, enjoys photography, old motorcycles and the great outdoors. He rose to fame when his book, "Smoke: New Firewood Cooking," was awarded a James Beard Foundation Award.

Byers' new role at Rudolph Foods is twofold.

"On the culinary innovation side, I help with flavor development," he said. "We do have an R&D team working in the food lab kitchen, and I bring a culinary perspective to that. I can say, 'Here's how we coax out a real taste memory.'"

"For example, if we're developing a pimento cheese flavor, I'm thinking about roasted peppers, cheddar and mayo elements — how to build something that feels authentic, not just like a lab exercise.

"On the foodservice side, I'm a spokesperson for the brand. I understand the end user because I've been in the restaurant business my whole life," said Byers. "I've written the checks, paid the bills and worked in both independent restaurants and big hotels. So I look at it from the operators' perspective and help

translate the manufacturer's side into something useful for the person at the end of the line.

"That means helping operators understand the margin opportunity, the storage and shipping advantages, and the cultural and menu relevance. It's a really interesting moment because some people are coming to the product from a health-conscious angle, and other people are coming to it because it's an authentic ingredient in recipes they already know and love," Byers said.

For the second year of a push toward foodservice, Rudolph Foods presented the pellets and Byers at the National Restaurant Association's trade show, which Byers said was well received.

"A lot of people know the product and say, 'Oh gosh, I haven't had that in a while,' or 'I didn't realize you could do this to order.' We fried with them there and everybody was amazed that you could take this shelf-stable, dehydrated item and turn it into something light and fresh in about a minute and a half.

"It was also fun to show the range of cuts. We've got pieces that fry up to about the size of your hand, ones the size of a big tray, all the way down to chip-size pork rinds. We also have cracklings with a little more meat and fat attached, which work especially well in Mexican dishes and other ethnic applications."

Byers calls freshly fried Southern Recipe Small Batch pork rind pellets a "perfect storm" for foodservice customers.

"On one side, you've got people looking at it from a diet perspective — no carb, protein-forward," he said. "It's also great for

people watching their macros, because if you're really rigid with that kind of eating, texture matters and people get bored.

"On the other side, you've got people who know and love it from childhood memories or from cultural traditions. You see that in Filipino cooking, Mexican culture and a lot of other places. So now it's both nostalgic and useful for people who want gluten-free or protein-forward options.

"That's a double win."

Byers has a friend with an East Texas/Louisiana-style restaurant who uses them as a french fry substitute with po'boy sandwiches and also serves them at the bar with cocktails and cracklings.

"It works because it fits his brand and gives guests something fun and familiar."

The key is letting foodservice operators know how they can let the pork rind pellets tell their own stories.

"My job right now is really to educate people on something they already know and love, and then show them how to cook it," Byers said. "It goes back to that original kitchen moment with Mark. I knew the product and knew how to make it from scratch, but I also knew it took forever. Then suddenly, in five minutes, we had a finished appetizer with seasoning and dip.

"That's still the story we're telling.

"What we're offering is a really great, reliable-quality product that can be fried fresh and then become your own," Byers said. "If I had Tim's Taqueria, I could buy these pellets from an industry leader, fry them fresh to order, season them my way and make them my own chicharrón." **GN**