



THE 99 CENT "ARTISAN KAISER"

It was a sure sign that barbeque season has begun as the snow has melted below the tops of the propane tanks and my wife suggested that we make barbequed burgers for dinner. We stopped at the farmers market for some organically beef burgers. We then went to our favourite artisan bakery and picked up breads and baguettes but alas there was nothing suitable for a bun.

We then proceeded to our local Safeway supermarket to pick up some groceries and stopped in the bakery. The sorry looking bag of 6 Kaisers were \$2.79 so I went over to the counter for large fresh "Safeway Artisan Kaisers" that were 99 cents each! Bringing six home, I was thoroughly disappointed to cut open these thin crusted weightless buns; three had air pockets the size of a golf ball. Our beautiful grilled, delicious organic patties sat on totally textureless and tasteless buns made with a long list of ingredients and chemicals.

I would like to buy more from my local artisan bakery but they cannot find enough qualified bakers and the cost of making rolls and buns by hand is prohibitive. The artisan baker loses the opportunity to enhance sales to a dedicated customer. Getting people to enter your bakery important, having them walk out with bags full of your products and a full cash register is the lifeblood of your business. In these tough economic times it is more important than ever to try to find new business opportunities. There is a growing demand from health conscious consumers who are looking for locally produced breads with flavour and texture and profitable market for high quality artisan breads & rolls at the retail and small wholesale levels.

In a Modern Baking magazine survey of bakery owners and managers, of their 10 biggest concerns, 6 were labor related issues. They included; increasing labor costs, finding experienced staff, training, quality control, keeping prices competitive and staff productivity. Finding the right equipment is the key to scaling up production, improving quality and adding some new products or taking on some wholesale artisan breads & rolls.

MAKING PROFITABLE SIGNATURE PRODUCTS

One of the keys to bakery success is making signature products. Rather than making the same items the grocery store offers, find a specialty product that your completion does not offer. Thirty years ago a baker showed me the benefits of not making stamped Kaisers. The margins on common rolls is very thin but instead he made a 8" long, 50 gram roll on his moulder and tied it into a knot, brushed with egg wash and sprinkled with seeds. It took only a few seconds but he told me that he sold them twice the price of his competitors.

Years later I was in a bakery in California and asked the owner why he did not make rolls. He said "there is no money in rolls, I can get only 30 cents for a round roll". On the bench there were four 1 pound chunks of his focaccia dough. I quickly showed him how to make straight bread sticks and began splitting them into 16, 4 oz pieces. We ran them through the moulder in less than 30 seconds; rolled the 12" long pieces in olive oil and fresh organic rosemary. When they baked them, we asked the staff to proof them and bake them while we were at lunch.



When we got back, the bakery smelled wonderful and we asked the four staff, "where are the rolls?" They said that they ate them all except one they left for us. I asked the owner what he should sell them for, he looked at me and asked "a dollar?" I told him to sell them for two dollars. He said "I only sell a loaf for \$4.00 and usually sell two loaves for a \$8 sale", I responded, "Trust me". He made 100 more and sold them at the farmers' market at \$2.00 apiece. Customers would buy a couple of loaves and one bread stick. They would walk away and then munch on the roll and turn around and buy 6 more. He sold out in minutes. He now takes 500 to each of the 3 farmers' market that he goes to. That's \$3,000 more revenue a week from less than 400 pounds of dough. He now makes a 5 oz stick he sells for \$2.25.



In most bakeries, staff have multiple tasks that may include; getting ingredients, mixing and folding batches, scaling, shaping, loading proofer, loading ovens and cleaning up. Out of an eight hour day, as little as one or two hours is available for scaling and shaping. A junior baker is doing well if they can shape 100 loaves and several dozen rolls in that period. With an artisan bread moulder, in that same time that same junior baker could scale and mould 300 loaves and instead of dozens of rolls, made 500 rolls, the added volume of work adds a few batches to be mixed, a fuller proofer, better use of a hot oven and the cleanup is no greater an effort. The increased efficiency has a higher profit margin as fixed costs are thinned and labor costs are economised. The investment in equipment need not be large and can be accomplished in bite sized chunks that can be paid off in a few months of labor savings. The product produced by quality equipment

will be more consistent and of higher quality as it is less dependent on the varying skills of your staff. This puts you in control rather than at the mercy of the whims and mood of your staff.

Not only will quality equipment improve your quality but will also reduce training time and broadens the scope of who you can hire. Furthermore, not being "locked to the bench" makes you a better manager allows more freedom and time train staff, to find better suppliers, solicit new accounts and develop new products. It also allows you or your staff to get away from the shop to attend baking courses to improve your skills.



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