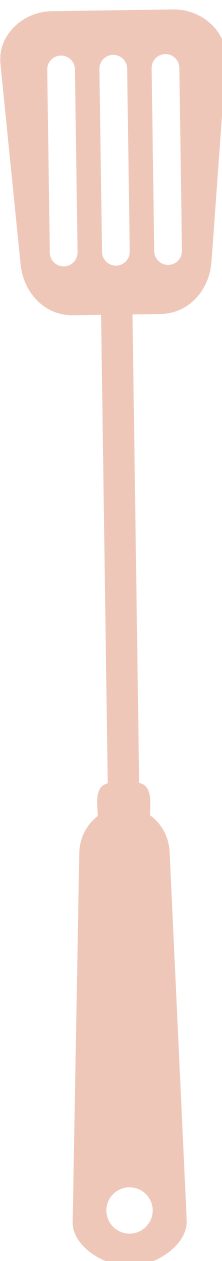




# Grill

# Licenses to



Operators who tested the new Chick-fil-A® Grilled Chicken products share their secret to exceptional execution: OE fundamentals.

**IMAGINE** seeing in only black and white, then one day waking up with full-color vision. That's how multi-Restaurant Operator Jeff Mosley felt when tasting the new suite of Chick-fil-A® Grilled Chicken products. Operators in three Markets—Birmingham, Alabama; Orange County, California; and Indianapolis, Indiana—have been testing these products since August 2013. Although Jeff had been content with the familiar flavors of the Chick-fil-A® Chargrilled Chicken Sandwich, the taste of the new Chick-fil-A® Grilled Chicken Sandwich, Chick-fil-A® Grilled Club Sandwich and Grilled Nuggets made him realize what he'd been missing.

"It's interesting to look back and taste what we have now compared to what we used to have for years. Man alive, there's no comparison!" says Jeff, Operator of The Crossing FSR and Castleton Square Mall in Indianapolis. "The Chargrilled Chicken Sandwich had been around for a long time, and we enjoyed it because we didn't know anything different. Our guests also liked what we had before, but they really love what we have right now."

Rolling out new products, even superior ones, can prove tricky. But there is a silver lining: New products with staying power demonstrate several "factors for success," according to a 2013 report

by the Nielsen Company, including three that perfectly embody the new Grilled Chicken products:

- **Distinct Proposition:** Products that represent true innovation
- **Need/Desire:** Items that are relevant to today's consumer
- **Advantage:** Products that are better than similar offerings

As Jeff and other test Operators have learned, realizing its full potential requires more than initial excitement; it demands a sustained commitment to quality.

## Training for Change

Operator Jeffrey Holifield says his team was excited about the new Grilled Chicken products. He knew gusto alone wouldn't build sales, so he channeled Team Members' enthusiasm into education, confident that his team could execute new products well if they understood them well.

He started with his Leadership Team. "We had a couple of meetings and talked about the upcoming test," says Jeffrey, Operator of McCalla FSR in Bessemer, Alabama. "We talked about the new products and the process of rolling them out, tried to answer any questions they had and then set up training days to train our kitchen crew."

From that point, training focused largely on the new grill used to prepare the products, as well as assembly of the new Chick-fil-A® Grilled Chicken Sandwich, which comes without pickles and requires stacking lettuce and tomato beneath the filet instead of on top.

Naturally, it also included a tasting. “I wanted my team to try the product so they would know how to answer customers’ questions about it,” says Jeffrey, who was careful to engage all Team Members, not just kitchen staff, in training sessions. “I also wanted my front-counter team to know how the Grilled Chicken Sandwich is prepared so they could inform customers.”

Training was just as important in Indianapolis, where Jeff armed his Team Members with information about the new products. “I may not do the hands-on work in the kitchen, but I need to be equipped to protect the brand and protect the product by making sure we understand what it is supposed to look like and how it’s supposed to taste,” Jeff says.

The eTrain program (formerly eTMDP) helped Jeff communicate to Team Members what he learned during his own training session. “The training materials—the videos and the pamphlets—are awesome,” he says. “We just took the iPad in the kitchen and showed everyone the new procedures. They picked things up very quickly.”

**Training is not a one-time event. Tracking and calibrating with your Team Members are essential for them to consistently follow procedures.**

### Back to Basics

Once their teams were up to speed on the new products, Operators in test Markets focused on execution. A few minor adjustments were necessary. In Jeffrey’s Restaurant, for example, accommodating Grilled Nuggets required installing an extra shelf in the walk-in freezer. Primarily, the new products demanded renewed focus on familiar processes—namely, holding times.

“Whether it’s classic Nuggets, the Spicy Chicken Sandwich or one of the new grilled products, it all comes back to holding times,” explains Jeff, who says Operators and Team Members must be dedicated to

maintaining the Grilled Chicken’s 30-minute holding time. “It’s the same commitment that Operators should have toward every other product on our menu. If there’s any deviation from that holding time, you’re going to have an inferior product.”

Unlike the Chargrilled Chicken Sandwich filets, which came pre-marinated from the supplier, the new Grilled Chicken must be marinated on site with a special basting glaze. Although the extra work is minimal—one additional three- to five-minute step—it demands further dedication to holding times.

“The only real procedural change for us was the added step of having to marinate the chicken,” Jeffrey says. “It can only be marinated for up to 24 hours. After that, it’s no good anymore.”

Tasking a designated Team Member with marinating ensures that the 24-hour marinating time isn’t exceeded. “Normally, the breeder will marinate the chicken,” he says. “Once they marinate the chicken, they put a date on it with a time so we can monitor it. He or she is in charge of pulling the chicken, applying the marinade and keeping track of the time.”

### Equipped for Excellence

Though training on the Grilled Chicken Sandwich and Nuggets is critical, the new equipment is the linchpin of excellence. The proprietary result of collaboration between Chick-fil-A and commercial kitchen company Garland, this state-of-the-art, computer-powered grill utilizes 360-degree heat to quickly cook chicken without compressing it. The result—filets and Nuggets that are moist, plump and flavorful—is as much a testament to technology as it is to the new recipe.

“Our Team Members were pretty excited to have a new piece of equipment,” Jeffrey says. Like most new technology, he admits, the grills were finicky at first, prone to glitches and hiccups that sometimes impacted speed of service. Thanks to several software updates, however, the current iteration works exactly as intended. “Over time, the software issues have improved. Now we aren’t having any major issues or problems.”

Still, the equipment has its challenges. The most significant, Jeffrey says, is cleanliness. “Cleaning the grill is the biggest challenge for us just because it takes longer,” he adds. “You’ve got to



**A regular customer at The Crossing FSR enjoys a new Grilled Chicken Sandwich.**

take everything apart. There are lots of pieces you have to wash, and you've got to really scrub the grill to get it clean."

Cleaning the former Taylor Grill takes approximately 30 minutes. Disassembling and cleaning the Garland Grill, on the other hand, initially took his Team Members close to an hour, although practice has since whittled that down to 45 minutes. Jeffrey found that the cleaning process could be streamlined further with a midday cleaning (as recommended in procedures) and by using the scraper that comes with the grill to remove debris after each cooking cycle. "At 1

or 2 p.m., when it's slower, we'll try to scrape everything and clean the grill as thoroughly as possible without taking it apart," he says. "When we do that, it doesn't take as long for the night crew."

Although the grill requires a little extra time and effort, the payoff is significant. "For me, it's a win," Jeff says. "The trade-off—getting out a little bit later at night in exchange for a phenomenally better product—is worth it."

Jeffrey agrees that the sandwich is a "big improvement" over Chargrilled. "Customers really like the new flavor," he says.

The benefit isn't just a better product. In some cases, it's also a new customer, like the 12-year-old boy whose family recently had their first restaurant meal in recent memory at The Crossing FSR. "Because of their young son's severe gluten allergy, this family had not been able to go to a restaurant for seven years," Jeff says. "We've been able to introduce them to the Grilled Nuggets, and in a six-week span, they were here six times. They just keep coming back. The son now has the freedom to enjoy eating out with his friends like a normal 12-year-old boy." **CRF**

**“I may not do the hands-on work in the kitchen, but I need to be equipped to protect the brand and protect the product by making sure we understand what the product is supposed to look like and how it is supposed to taste.**

— Operator Jeff Mosley

## THE **SKINNY** ON GRILLED CHICKEN

Home office staff members explain the genesis of the new Grilled Chicken products and offer a preview of the chain-wide rollout.

Most everyone knows the history of the Chick-fil-A® Chicken Sandwich: Truett Cathy invented it in the early 1960s when he discovered a pressure cooker that used oil and could cook a boneless chicken breast in the same amount of time it took to grill a hamburger—about four minutes. On the eve of Chick-fil-A's next great innovation—a new suite of Grilled Chicken products—*Create* asks Barry Vaughan, director, Menu Development, and Jay File, senior management consultant, Field Operations, to share the new menu items' origin story.

### **Create: How did the new Grilled Chicken products come about?**

**Barry:** In terms of the macro trend of health and wellness, we want to be able to provide grilled options that appeal to our customer base. However, we've never been overly pleased with where we performed historically with the grilled lineup. Even

though our current product is better than any other QSR, it's not one we thought was our very best. We set out to develop a sandwich that is to grilled sandwiches what the Chick-fil-A® Chicken Sandwich is to a fried chicken sandwich.

We don't want guests to have to "trade down" or sacrifice if watching their calorie or fat intake. We want them to actually come in with the idea of getting our grilled sandwich. We want that sandwich to be so good that folks who are eating with us three or four times a month come in one or two more times because of the additional grilled platform.

### **Create: How did Chick-fil-A arrive at the new Grilled Chicken recipe?**

**Barry:** We've developed hundreds of different recipes during the time we've been working on this. We wanted this to be a very





customer-centric decision, so we partnered with several of our suppliers and had each of them submit different recipes they felt would go well with our chicken platform. We had thousands of customers across the country taste these recipes, as well as some developed by our own culinary team.

When we narrowed it down to three, we did a central location test, where

we invited Chick-fil-A customers who often eat grilled products at our competitors in QSR, casual dining, fast casual and even fine dining. They evaluated the sandwich based on four key attributes: overall taste, purchase intent, quality consistency with Chick-fil-A and whether they liked the flavor of it. We got very, very high marks on each of those four. Whereas our current flavor profile is pickle-based, the new one is very savory and has a lot of natural smoke to it. Even cooked on our current grill, it's a better product.

**Create: How was the new Garland Grill developed?**

**Jay:** We've heard for years from customers and Operators that our Chargrilled product is average. As we look across the Chick-fil-A menu, we don't want average products. We want superior, best-in-class products. We knew that meant a different cooking platform. We explored multiple options and kept running into the same stumbling block: How do we do this in the same space as the current grill and within the same cooking cycle? We do not have excess space in Restaurants, so a grill had to be the same size as our current machines. We also wanted something on which we could cook 10 filets in about 3.5 minutes, because we're fast food. We could not find a grill anywhere in the country, or even internationally, that would meet our needs.

We pursued a couple different partners, but ultimately selected Garland. We both had some proprietary knowledge, so we jointly created this new grill platform. That's why the machine we have is one-of-a-kind. It doesn't exist anywhere else.

The uniqueness of the grill is that, through technology, the top closes and rests right on top of the chicken, so it puts grill marks on the chicken but doesn't flatten it. It's almost like cooking the chicken on your backyard grill (no flipping necessary). But because we have heat on the top and bottom simultaneously, you're able to cook it in 3.5 minutes as opposed to the 15 minutes it takes at home.

**Create: How were the test Markets chosen?**

**Barry:** Our first beta test tested the initial prototypes of the grill itself. We wanted to do that test somewhere close enough for us to monitor it, but also somewhere close to our grill manufacturer in Toronto. So in May, we selected six Restaurants here in West Atlanta, plus one in Erie, Pennsylvania. In August, we expanded to a total of 57 Restaurants in Indianapolis, Indiana; Orange County, California; and Birmingham, Alabama. We always like to test things in geographically dispersed areas

where the taste, patterns and buying habits are very different. California is on the cutting edge of health and wellness trends; Indianapolis is a good, solid market for us; and Birmingham represents that Deep South flavor palate. We felt if we could do well in each of these Markets, we'd be in a great position when rolling out chain-wide.

**Create: What did you learn during Market testing?**

**Jay:** A lot. The consensus is that this chicken is far superior. However, I think we also realized this grill is harder to clean than we thought. It's nothing like our current grill. There are startup procedures, cleaning and maintenance required between each cook cycle, and midday and end-of-day cleaning. Initially, it's a big change from the current cleaning procedures. Some Operators were prepared for that; others were not.

We also changed the sauce of the sandwich. We learned early in the test that our customers prefer honey-roasted barbecue sauce to the smoky barbecue sauce we had replaced it with. We heard loud and clear that they wanted the honey-roasted, so we brought it back.

**Create: How will the new products launch across the chain?**

**Barry:** It's more of a "roll-in" than a rollout. Each Monday in March, we'll roll-in an additional set of Restaurants. Rather than doing a hard start and a hard stop, we're taking the inventory of our current Chargrilled Chicken and moving it from distribution center to distribution center, which will allow us to minimize inventory levels while at the same time rolling-in the new product. We'll roll-in anywhere from 225 to 350 Restaurants a week. The entire chain will have the new product beginning Monday, March 31, and everyone will begin a National Campaign together in April.



**Team Member Jeremiah Lawrence prepares a Grilled Chicken Sandwich at McCalla FSR.**