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## IDEAS 2 GO: IN A PICKLE

Mississippi's Double Quick gains national attention for its sweet and sour marinated treats.

By Al Hebert

Could a single pickle set your store apart from the competition? Double Quick, a 45-store chain headquartered in Indianola, Mississippi, thinks so. The retailer has successfully refined a local favorite that's caught the attention of a cable food network and The New York Times.

Rick Beuning, vice president of foodservice operations at Double Quick, explained the buzz surrounding an everyday dill pickle — but marinated in Kool-Aid and sugar. Turns out, this treat is a local favorite the retailer isn't taking credit for: "We didn't invent it. We just developed a good recipe, gave it a name and started selling."

Double Quick owners heard talk of the sweet-marinated pickle and sent Beuning on a quest to learn more. "Kids love them. People were selling them out of their homes. We began to work on prototypes by combining recipes from a couple of our store managers. We got kids together to test them and finally came up with what's become, in many of our stores, the signature brand of pickle."

The retailer settled on a tropical punch mix for the best red hue and flavor. But the new treat — part pickle, part Kool-Aid — needed a name. After some research Beuning came up with Pickoola, now a popular treat in many of the company's 44 Mississippi and Arkansas stores. When asked to describe Pickoola's flavor, he describes it like "a bread and butter pickle, but sweeter with a tropical flavor, but it's sour and sweet. It's real different. It's red."



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## Commitment to Fresh Food

Beyond the pickle jar, Double Quick locations feature either a Hot & Crispy Deli, Church's Chicken or a freestanding Krystal's.

Double Quick is also experiencing growth in one of the most economically challenged parts of the country: the Mississippi Delta and surrounding areas. "We give the best value for the dollar. We offer five pieces of fried or baked chicken for \$3.69. That's a great deal for the best tasting chicken around." Online coupons offer additional savings on breakfast items, lunch plates and everyday items, including Mississippi farm-raised catfish.

Beuning explained the retailer's commitment to serving fresh food. "We absolutely do everything from scratch...We never have any frozen chicken. When available, our greens come from local vendors and they are delivered to our stores."



He also admits that delivering on the company's promise to offer fresh food isn't easy. "You work harder. It takes more labor," he said, adding that the reward comes from satisfied customers who realize the difference in quality and taste.

And like many convenience store foodservice programs, it's a challenge to convince customers that good food can come from a gas station. "There's a stigma about food from a gas station," said Beuning. "Ours is unique and as good — if not

better — than most restaurants. We developed our own unique seasoning; we use fresh chicken and fresh tenders, not the frozen pre-breaded kind," he said.

And in the South, where sweet tea is as much a daily staple as it is a southern tradition, Double Quick delivers on both quality and taste. "Some of our Church's restaurants sell 150-plus gallons of tea each week in addition to that sold in to-go cups," said Beuning.

## A Walk in Their Shoes

At Double Quick, corporate staff understands the challenges store-level employees face — especially after they step into their shoes. Soon after being hired, corporate staff spends a few days working in a store and returns for occasional refreshers during store openings or new product/service launches.

"People in the office appreciate what the store staff deals with every day. We learn to do each job. We get a feel for the customers," said Double Quick Marketing Manager Curlina Williams.

Beuning said the experience of running the registers, frying chicken and stocking coolers and shelves gives corporate staff a better perspective on what it takes to be a frontline employee. "Everything done at the office is to support the stores. When they come back, they appreciate what the store employees go through."

The future for Double Quick is bright, with new store openings planned and a strong dedication to customer service and excellent food all critical to the company's growth. However, Beuning feels there's one more thing that will ensure success: "Knack — you have to have a knack for doing something better than the competition. It's that way with our recipes, it's the way we do everything."

*Al Hebert is the Gas Station Gourmet and showcases America's culinary treasure —gas station*