

Electrolux Professional Dito TRK55
combination food processor

A rest for the chef's knife

The latest
food
processors
make
prep
easier
and faster

by Russell L. Bean, CFSP

Ingredient preparation can be kind of fun and even therapeutic when taken in small doses. Focusing on basic technique and the rhythms of cleaning, trimming, slicing, chopping, dicing, mincing, doing julienne cuts and the overall process of mise en place, harkens back to simpler times. But as time pressures and production volume grows, the ingredient preparation process becomes more and more of a chore. While purchasing pre-cut product is one possible solution, higher food costs can offset any time savings or reduction in labor costs. Fortunately, there is a bunch of powered prep equipment designed to speed and simplify the process and take most of the misery out of mise en place.

Most ingredient preparation involves vegetable and fruit handling. Manufacturers have developed an impressive array of power-assisted, automated and semi-automated equipment that can reduce fruit or vegetables to the size, shape and consistency needed for recipes, sandwich making, pizza toppings or salad use. Powered food processors can be used to replace the chef's knife, a mandolin, hand grater and other hand-powered cutters, even handle some of the mixing

and blending chores.

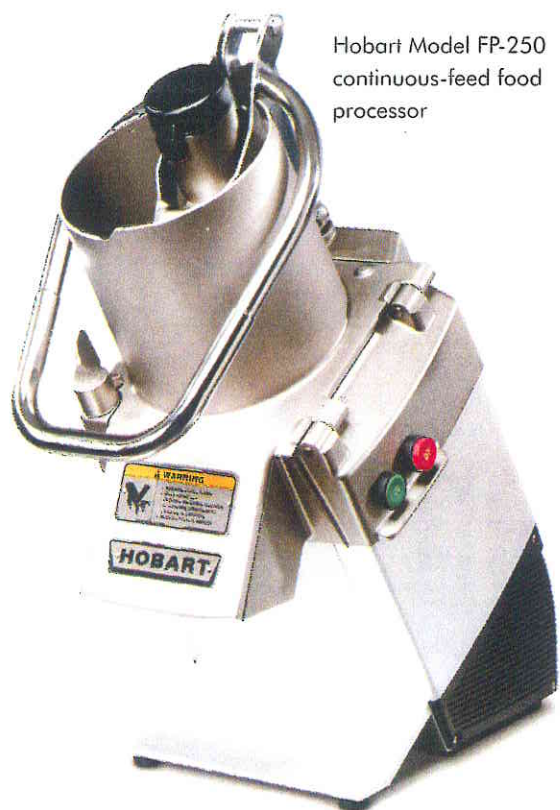
Commercial food processors have evolved to better meet the prep needs of restaurant operators. They can generally be categorized as: bowl-type, continuous-feed or combination units.

Bowl-type processors

Bowl-type food processors are the most basic, and at the lower end, the least expensive, resembling their home-kitchen counterparts. They have a metal or plastic cylindrical container that mounts on top of an enclosed motor base. Cutting blades are mounted inside the container, with a bottom bearing/shaft assembly that rests on the drive motor coupling, similar to a blender. Smaller models have a clear plastic cover or a stainless cover with a viewing widow. Larger versions have a cover with a feed port or chute and product pusher. Models with feed ports can be used for rough-slicing, dicing and shredding, plus julienne and crinkle cuts. Different blades are used to accomplish different cutting operations.

Jackson, Miss.-based Robot Coupe USA's Light-Duty Vegetable Prep and Vertical Cutter-Mixer is a good example, offering a choice of 21

A rest for the chef's knife



Hobart Model FP-250 continuous-feed food processor

different processing disks, a clear 2 1/2-quart cutter bowl, a lid with two deep feed openings and a 3/4-horsepower direct drive motor.

If you need a bit more capacity, you can move up to the Model FP40 built by Torrington, Conn.-based Waring Commercial. It is a 4-quart bowl-type processor that boasts a commercial-grade 1 1/2 horsepower motor, large feed tube, both small and large food pushers and pulse control, so you don't need to turn it off and on to fine-tune the chop. This unit will slice, shred, grate and julienne directly into the bowl, which has two nice grab handles. That bowl, its cover, food pushers, S-blades and accessory cutting disks are all dishwasher safe, for easier cleanups.

In addition to their role in shredding and chopping, higher-end bowl processors can also be used to blend recipe ingredients and make sauces. With multiple motor speeds and pulse capability, these processors are very versatile. They can even aerate, mix, blend and liquefy.

Continuous-feed fills big need
Continuous-feed food processors are made for

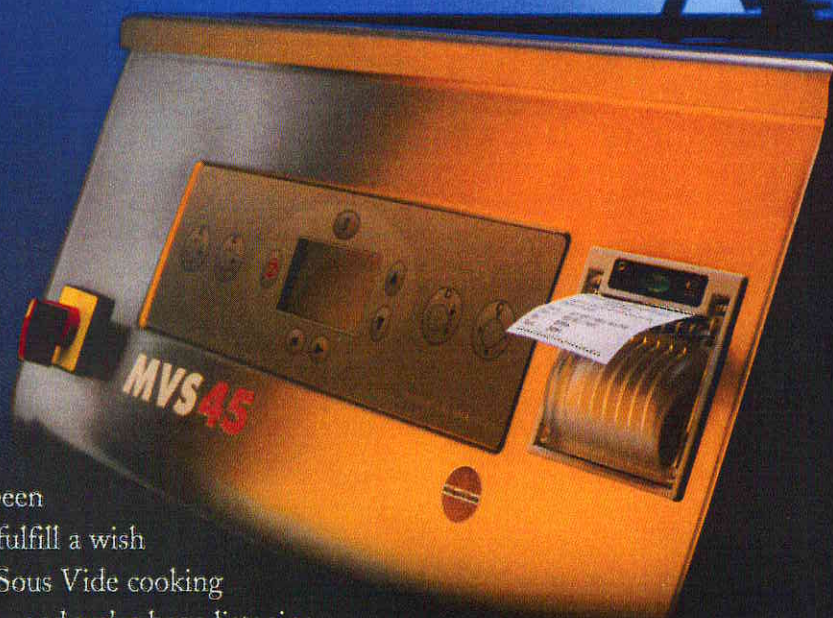
higher volume prep production and look the part. They are typically sized or rated in pounds per hour of cut product. Continuous-feed models have an enclosed motor base with a protruding drive shaft that supports a cantilevered (or vertical) cutting head assembly. That stainless-steel or cast-aluminum head is designed to discharge sliced or shredded product into a separate container or even pile it on the countertop, through a sloped discharge chute. The cutting head on many models is angled up to 45 degrees, to make it easier and more ergonomic to load veggies into the feed hopper or hoppers.

Feed hopper design varies by make and model. Some manufacturers provide both a small (tall-product) feed hopper for carrots, green onions and celery, plus a larger hopper for whole potatoes and other bulky product. Troy, Ohio-based Hobart's Model FP300 continuous-feed processor has a larger feed hopper that covers half the cutting head top and can accommodate multiple potatoes and large cabbage wedges for higher volume applications. More basic models come with a handheld product pusher to provide continuous uniform pressure on vegetables when slicing, and it keeps operator fingers well away from the very sharp cutting disks. Larger, more elaborate models like the FP300 have hinged top-mounted product pushers with a robust lever or handle to make it easy to keep the pressure on.

The upper cutting chamber and feed hopper can be opened and removed for cleaning and to change cutting disks. The cutters are thin, round stainless-steel disks that are slotted to provide the appropriate slicing, dicing, chopping or shredding action. Cutting disks must be changed to deliver a different processing operation. Manufacturers typically sell them as accessories, individually and in sets.

The cutting blade and cutting chamber/head needs to be cleaned whenever the cut or product is changed, so ease of cleaning is important. Hobart's continuous-feed FP250 Model is the only

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Berkel CC34 combination food processor

food processor available with Diwash components that can be washed in either high-temperature or chemical dish machines without fear of corrosion or staining.

Combination units

Bowl-type processors are great for very fine chopping, plus doing any subsequent mixing, blending or puréeing of ingredients required. Continuous-feed food processors are perfect for high-volume cutting and shredding. Combination food processors offer the best of both worlds. Combination units have a common motor base that can mount either a vertical mixing bowl module or the cantilevered, continuous-feed slicing/shredding head.

For example, Dito TRK Series Combination Food Processors from Electrolux Professional, Fort Lauderdale, Fla., can do all the food cutting operations of a vegetable slicer, and then convert to a food processor in a few seconds, to purée or do mixing operations. This unit can be disassembled without tools, has an all stainless-steel hopper assembly with both tall product and large product hoppers and an ergonomic easy-lift product pusher handle. All parts can be cleaned in the dish machine. TRK Models have simple touch-pad controls with electronic variable speed and pulse control for precise slicing and finishing. For added operator safety, they provide hopper, lid and bowl interlock systems that cut power if that component is not in place or closed.

Robot Coupe USA is another prep equipment provider that offers combination bowl/continuous veggie processing in its R301 Ultra Series D. This unit has a one-speed, 1 1/2-horsepower motor and is capable of preparing 600-800 servings in 2 1/2 hours, according to the manufacturer. The R301 Ultra Series D comes

with a 3 1/2 -quart stainless-steel bowl with handle, plastic see-through cover and smooth-edge S-type blade for bowl processing. For continuous processing, you get a rugged ABS polycarbonate vegetable slicer with two (large/small) feed hoppers. It comes with grating and slicing disks, but 21 different stainless-steel disks available for other chopping and slicing chores.

Troy, Ohio-based Berkel's Model CC34 combination food processor has a heavy-duty cast-aluminum body with integrated handles, a 1 1/2 horsepower motor with four operating speeds, plus a pulse function to match the cutting need. The CC34 comes with a 3.2-quart stainless-steel bowl, knife unit, lid and scraper for uniform mixing. When converted with the continuous feed attachment and ejector plate, it will prepare up to 4.4 pounds of product per minute.

Give your knife and wrists a rest. Bowl-type, continuous-feed and the new combination food processors can make short work of most veggie prep operations.



Waring Model FP40 commercial food processor

Manufacturers directory

- Berkel
(800) 348-0251
www.berkelcompany.com
- Electrolux Professional (Dito)
(866) 449-4200
www.electroluxusa.com/professional
- Hobart Corp.
(888) 446-2278
www.hobartcorp.com
- Robot Coupe USA, Inc.
(800) 824-1646
www.robotcoupeusa.com
- Waring Commercial
(800) 492-7464
www.waringproducts.com/com

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