

# SOPE STAR

BY KATIE AYOUB

As deeper exploration into Mexican cuisine continues to drive modern menu innovation, the sope offers great potential. A classic Mexican comfort food, it's most often seen as an antojito, or appetizer. Its base is made with crisp-fried masa harina, usually formed into a disc, ready to hold a few layers of big flavor. Here, the sope is topped with black beans spiked with salsa and fresh jalapeño, a crumble of Wisconsin queso blanco and then finished with pickled jalapeño.

"Sopes are an authentic Mexican dish with countless regional variations," says Allen Hendricks, vice president of foodservice & education for the Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board. "Chefs in the U.S. can explore versions with traditional Mexican flavors and ingredients, or create their own unique styles." As with a taco or burger, toppings help build winning flavor. "Craveable add-ons—like Wisconsin cheese—increase the appeal, making sopes a great choice for small plate and bar bite menus," says Hendricks. And for a Latin profile like the sope, it's interesting to note that Hispanic/Mexican-style varieties are among the fastest-growing cheese varieties on menus today, according to Technomic.

## THE PICKLE

Pickled red onion finishes the profile with a balance of acidity and crunch. Pickled jalapeños and carrots would also work well here.

## THE CHEESE

Queso blanco is a fresh, mild, salty cheese that resists melting and browns easily. Queso fresco could be used instead, offering a mellow, creamy flavor.

## THE BASE

A versatile comfort base hailing from Mexico, the sope offers up the nutty, slightly sweet flavor of a corn tortilla.