

Back in a Jiffy: At 90, iconic Michigan brand finds its recipes still right for the times

Robin Watson - Special to The Detroit News
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When Vice President-elect Kamala Harris shared her favorite recipe for cornbread dressing last year, she didn't disclose the brand of baking mix used in it. Perhaps being politic, she just said that its name begins with "J."

Here in Michigan, we knew what she meant. Jiffy Mixes. The retro brand from Chelsea. Turns out, everyone knew. Social media lit up as Jiffy fans shared the recipe, which also received coverage in Glamour magazine, the Washington Post and other publications.

Jiffy Mixes — there are 14 of them — turned 90 in the spring and are produced by the privately held, family-owned, \$100-million Chelsea Milling Co. (CMC). Founded by Howard Samuel Holmes and Mabel White Holmes, the company was launched with a baking mix for whipping up biscuits "in a jiffy." Corn-muffin mix — the company's top-seller with 1.5 million boxes produced daily — came next.



Spoon Bread Casserole is JIFFY's most popular recipe. "JIFFY" Mix, Chelsea Milling Co.

The company operates with nearly vertical integration — they don't grow the corn or make the boxes — and does not advertise. Its product line includes mixes for pie crust, cake, pancakes and waffles, pizza dough and various

muffins. Recently added vegetarian and honey versions of the corn-muffin mix expanded sales opportunities. The brand is quaint, but not sleepy.

“Sales volume for baking mixes overall have been flat-to-declining since 1991, but our market share increased during that time,” says President and CEO Howard “Howdy” Holmes, who has helmed the company since 1998. A former race car driver, Holmes sped the company through modernization efforts, ruffling some family members’ feathers. But his strategic moves strengthened the company.

“Wall Street calls the Jiffy brand ‘iconic hip,’” Holmes says.

To keep up with demand, Jiffy runs three shifts. And, instead of the usual three weekends of overtime during its busy fall season, it had 15 under its belt by mid-December.

“People are staying at home and eating at home,” Holmes says. “Baking gives them something to do.”

Price, value and versatility make Jiffy a pantry staple from coast to coast in kitchens humble or posh for cooks with skills and those with next to none. Chefs use it, too. In “The Good Book of Southern Baking” written with Kate Heddings, New Orleans-based James Beard award-winning pastry chef Kelly Fields shares her love of Jiffy corn-muffin mix and how to use it as a canvas for flavor.

“People appreciate that our product is just good food at a great price with no smoke and mirrors,” Holmes adds.

Nostalgia’s also a powerful tug. For many, preparing something from Jiffy was one of their first baking projects.

“Jiffy is a product of emotion,” Holmes says. “People learn about it via word of mouth from parent to child, grandparent to grandchild. When you show kids how to bake, that emotional connection is strong.”



“JIFFY” Taco Pie “JIFFY” Mix, Chelsea Milling Co.

Such early exposure also locks in sensory memories. For those raised on it, Jiffy is a taste of home. Jiffy cornbread, for example, sets the bar early on with its tender crumb, rich aroma and distinctively sweet flavor.

“In the South, this is considered by many to be a sacrilege,” says Nashville-based cookbook author and baking expert Anne Byrn, “but honestly, many — in the South and outside it — like sweet cornbread. Thus, the longtime appeal of Jiffy.”

That long history gives Jiffy essential street cred these days.

“This is the time to buy trusted brands you know,” Byrn says. “The retro packaging is recognizable. For many of today’s shoppers making fewer and faster trips to the store, watching food costs and looking to stock the pantry, Jiffy is a brand they know and trust. So, you bake muffins out of Jiffy Mix because you know they will work and how they taste. It’s not the time to waste money on the unknown.”

And then there’s the convenience factor at a time when everyone in the household needs to pitch in.

“It’s so simple a man can do it,” Holmes says.

Spicy Cornbread Dressing

No need to relegate this delicious dressing to Thanksgiving-only service. Richly textured and spicy, it’s delicious on its own or served as an accompaniment to a main course. Change up the flavor profile with the sausage of your choice — chorizo, hot Italian or a milder, sagey bulk breakfast sausage. Change up the spices, too, to suit your taste. Spiciness nicely counteracts the sweetness of the cornbread. Can’t use it all at once? It freezes well. Recipe adapted from Kamala Harris’ Instagram recipe.



Kamala Harris’ Cornbread Dressing *Robin Watson*

- 2 8½-ounce packages Jiffy Corn Muffin Mix, original or vegetarian
- Unsalted butter for greasing the baking dish
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 pound chorizo, crumbled
- 2 onions, chopped
- 2 apples, cored and chopped
- 4 celery stalks, diced
- ¾ cup turkey or chicken broth
- ¼ cup unsalted butter, melted
- ¼ cup fresh parsley, chopped
- Big handful fresh sage, chopped
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme
- 1 teaspoon dried rosemary
- 1 teaspoon smoked Spanish paprika
- Ground black pepper, to taste

Prepare the cornbread according to the instructions on the package.

Once cooled, crumble it into a large mixing bowl. The cornbread can be baked a day or two ahead of time.

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees. Butter a 9x13-inch baking dish. Set aside.

Heat the olive oil in a skillet over medium heat. Brown the chorizo in hot oil, breaking it up as you go. Using a slotted spoon, remove the chorizo from the pan and add it to the bowl of crumbled cornbread. Leave the rendered fat in the pan — if the chorizo is super lean, pour a bit more olive oil to the pan.

Add the onions, apples and celery to the pan and saute until just softened, but still a bit crisp, then add to the cornbread and chorizo. Stir everything together with a fork, then add the remaining ingredients and stir to thoroughly combine.

Add the mixture to the greased baking dish and bake for 40 to 45 minutes, or until browned and crispy on top.

Spoon Bread Casserole

Recipe courtesy of Jiffy Mix, Chelsea Milling Co.

Yields: 6 to 8 Servings

- 1 package Jiffy Corn Muffin Mix (vegetarian or original)
- 1/2 cup margarine or butter, melted
- 1 can (8³/₄-ounce) whole-kernel corn, drained
- 1 can (8¹/₄ ounce) cream-style corn
- 1 cup sour cream
- 2 eggs

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees. Grease a 1 ½-quart casserole dish.

Pour the margarine or butter and corn into the dish. Blend in the sour cream.

In a separate bowl, beat the eggs and stir them into casserole. Add the corn-muffin mix. Blend thoroughly.

Bake for 35 to 40 minutes, or until the center is firm.

Jalapeno Cornbread

Recipe courtesy of Jiffy Mix, Chelsea Milling Co.

- 2 packages Jiffy Corn Muffin Mix (Vegetarian or Original)
- 3 eggs
- ¾ cup buttermilk
- ½ cup sour cream
- 4 jalapeño peppers, cored, seeded and diced
- 1 small red pepper, diced

Preheat oven to 400 degrees.

Grease a 9-inch square pan or a 10-inch cast-iron skillet. Place the greased pan or skillet in the oven while you prepare the cornbread batter.

Combine all ingredients. Blend well. Pour into the hot pan or skillet. Bake for 30 to 35 minutes. Makes 10 -12 servings.



“JIFFY” Jalapeno Cornbread © “JIFFY” Chelsea Milling Co.

Taco Pie

Recipe courtesy of Jiffy Mix, Chelsea Milling Co.

Yield: 2 9-inch pies

For the crust

- 1 package Jiffy Corn Muffin Mix
- 1 cup flour
- ½ cup shortening
- 4 to 5 tablespoons cold water

For the filling

- 2 pounds ground beef
- 1 cup onions, chopped
- 2 (1¼-ounce packages) taco seasoning
- 1 cup salsa
- 4 cups cheddar cheese, shredded
- 1 (16-ounce can) refried beans
- Lettuce, shredded, to taste
- Tomatoes, chopped, to taste
- Sour cream (optional), to taste
- Salsa (optional), to taste

Preheat oven to 400 degrees.

For the crust

Combine the corn-muffin mix and flour. Cut in the shortening until the mixture resembles small peas. Add the water, a little at a time. Stir with a fork until the dough is moist and holds together. Divide the dough in half and form it into 2 balls. Roll out the dough, making each ball about 1 inch larger than the inverted pie pans.

Place crusts in the ungreased pie pans and prick the bottoms and sides with a fork. Trim and shape the edges. Bake for 10 to 12 minutes. Set aside.

For the filling

Brown the ground beef and onions. Add the taco seasoning and salsa. Blend well. Sprinkle 1 cup of the cheese over each of the pie crusts. For each, spoon half of meat mixture over the cheese. Spread half of beans over the meat. Top each with the remaining cheese. Bake the pies for 5 to 8 minutes, or until the cheese melts. Top with lettuce and tomatoes. Serve with sour cream and salsa.

Banana Split Pie

Recipe courtesy of Jiffy Mix, Chelsea Milling Co.

Yield: 1 9-inch pie

- 1 package Jiffy Pie-Crust Mix
- 1 (1¾-ounce package) instant vanilla-pudding mix
- 1 ¾ cups milk
- 3 tablespoons corn syrup
- 1 (11¾-ounce) jar fudge topping
- 2 bananas
- ½-pound fresh strawberries, sliced
- 1 8-ounce can crushed pineapple, drained (reserve juice)
- 1 8-ounce container whipped topping, thawed
- ¼ cup nuts, chopped
- 1 small jar maraschino cherries (optional)



Banana Split Pie “JIFFY” Mix, Chelsea Milling Co.

Preheat oven to 450 degrees.

Prepare the pie crust mix as directed on the package for a one-crust pie. Prick bottom with a fork. Bake for 10 to 13 minutes.

Combine the pudding mix and milk. Blend well and chill in the refrigerator.

Mix together the corn syrup and ¾ of the fudge topping. Spread over the pre-baked pie crust. Slice the bananas into the reserved pineapple juice; stir gently. Place half the bananas over the chocolate. Spread half the pudding over the bananas. Arrange the strawberries, pineapple and remaining bananas over the pudding. Spread the remaining pudding over the fruit. Cover with the whipped topping, sprinkle with nuts and garnish with cherries (optional).

Chill before serving. Drizzle the remaining fudge topping over the top of the pie (optional).

Cashew Cherry Cookies

Recipe courtesy of Jiffy Mix, Chelsea Milling Co.

Yield: 60 to 72 Cookies

- 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ cups Jiffy Buttermilk Pancake & Waffle Mix
- 1 cup margarine or butter
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup sugar
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup brown sugar, firmly packed
- 2 eggs
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 cup flour
- 1 (12-ounce package) white-chocolate chips
- 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups dried cherries
- 1 cup lightly salted cashews, chopped



Cashew Cherry Cookies "JIFFY" Mix, Chelsea Milling Co.

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees.

Cream the margarine or butter with the sugars. Add the eggs and vanilla. Mix until smooth. Stir in the remaining ingredients. Drop by teaspoon onto an ungreased baking sheet.

Bake for 11 to 14 minutes, or until lightly browned.

<https://www.detroitnews.com/story/life/food/2021/01/13/back-jiffy-90-iconic-michigan-brand-finds-its-recipes-still-right-times/6601329002/>