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*New*

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# FOOD *ff* FOCUS

BARBECUE



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## SOAK IT UP!

From the Carolinas to Texas to Korea, barbecue remains the champ.

*by Ed Finkel,  
contributing editor*

The barbecue category continues to marinate well with consumers, more of whom are open to less-traditional styles that have emerged on the scene recently, blending regional and even international methods and tastes. Texas-style brisket seems to be, well, Texas-sized in terms of overall impact, although pork and poultry as well as oth-

er regional styles are finding their cadres of aficionados.

Figures from Technomic show that 38.3% of operators menu food that's barbecued, up 3.9% in the past five years. Chicken is the most commonly found protein featuring a barbecued preparation, followed by beef and then pork. "Barbecued" is the second on the list of preparation styles that diners pre-

fer for lunch or dinner entrées with beef (39%, vs. 55% who prefer grilled) and chicken (43%, tied with baked, vs. 46% who prefer grilled) and tied for first with grilled pork at 42%, according to Technomic's Ignite menu data.

Technomic's data show the number of beef barbecue menu items has fallen to a total of 1,822, from 1,914 across 1,007

operators surveyed in 2014, although the company notes "the decrease is in line with the overarching menu simplification trend." Beef is most often found at traditional casual dining (787 items), followed by quick service (513) and fast casual (267).

Datassential's research shows that barbecue is found in most types of restaurants except for fine

dining, and although growth is slowing, it's still found on 59% of menus. The fastest growing regional identities for barbecue offerings are "Kansas City," "Carolina" — and "Korea." Bottom line, more than three-quarters of consumers (78%) say they "love" or "like" barbecue.

Figures from Datassential show that chicken remains the most common protein within barbecue-flavored menu items at 67.4%, although that's down 1.6% in the past four years. Pork is found within 37.6% of menu items, up 4.3% in the past four years. Bacon sits at 34.1%, up 9.9% over four years, followed by wings, 29.2%, up 4.3%; and beef, 26.2%, down 4.3%.

The list of fastest-growing barbecue-related menu items contains a mix of those traditionally and more

recently associated with smoking and grilling, according to Datassential's figures. Pork belly, a newer item on the radar of barbecue chefs, has risen 88.1% on menus in the past four years, although it registers on just 1.4% of menus. On the more traditional side, pork shoulder is up 82.9% in the past four years and it's on 1.7% of menus overall; and brisket has risen by 48.8% in the past four years and has 7.9% penetration.

The consumption of beef during the 15-week summer grilling and smoking season rose 6.2% in pounds and 8% in dollars from 2017-2018, according to IRI Freshlook figures provided by Steve Hixon, strategic & business services director at Midan Marketing. "So far, the trends are consistent for this year versus last," Hixon says.

"The items that sold highest were the ribs and the loins; you're looking at ribeye, strip steak, tenderloin and also T-bone. A lot of your thin meats — your skirt, your flank — those are pretty hot, as well."

Hixon also has noticed restaurants getting more into less-stereotypical barbecued meats such as veal and lamb, which he expects will translate into retail dollar sales as home cooks experiment with what they enjoyed at foodservice. He's also seen more interest in kebabs, in part because they integrate vegetables to create a healthier mix. In terms of sauces and rubs, Hixon cites dark chilis, cumin, oregano, garlic, craft beers, coffee rubs, and lime with cayenne or chili peppers. "That's translating nicely for a Korean or Latin American flair," he says of the latter.

**BARBECUED PORK** was the most popular pork-related item for consumers, with **83%** saying they "love" or "like" it, followed by pork chops (77%), and pork at breakfast or on pizza (each 76%). — Nielsen data provided by the National Pork Board



**DURING THE SUMMER GRILLING SEASON, GROCERY BASKETS THAT CONTAIN PORK CHOPS OR RIBS ARE WORTH THREE TIMES AS MUCH, ON AVERAGE.**

— Nielsen Grilling Analysis, provided by NPB



**BBQ ITEMS WERE FEATURED MOST OFTEN ON MENUS IN THE MIDWEST (65.2%) AND LEAST OFTEN IN THE WEST (56.9%).** — Datassential



**BEEF CUTS THAT ENJOY THE LARGEST SHARE OF THEIR YEARLY SALES DURING THE SUMMER MONTHS ARE KEBABS (59%), BOTTOM SIRLOIN (48%) AND SIRLOIN STEAK (43%).**

— IRI/Freshlook data provided by National Cattlemen's Beef Assn.



**WHAT'S NEW**



**BEER 'N BBQ**

Coleman Natural has rolled out a new line of five pork-based barbecue and grilling items designed to appeal to beer-and-barbecue lovers, called the Budweiser BBQ Collection. Made with slow-roasted, all-natural Coleman pork, the line includes full- and half-rack St. Louis Pork Spare Ribs and Pulled Pork in Budweiser Brewmaster's Premium BBQ Sauce; and Beer Bratwurst and Jalapeno Cheddar Beer Bratwurst infused with Budweiser Lager Beer.



## TOP CUTS at retail



**B**risquet has probably gained most quickly in popularity with backyard smokers and grillers, but other cuts do well with amateur pitmasters, too.

Brisket dollar sales have risen 22% from 2014 to 2018, according to IRI/Freshlook data provided by the National Cattlemen's Beef Assn. They were up another 4% year-over-year in January through April of this year. Rack ribs were up only 1.2% from 2014 to 2018, although up 3% year-over-year from January through April, with the peak of summer grilling season yet to come, says Alison Krebs, director of market intelligence at NCBA.

Top-selling beef cuts during the 15-week grilling season in 2018 were ribeye, strip and T-bone steaks. Still, deckle-off brisket is in demand, according to IRI/Freshlook. "With all these new grills with a smoker section, you're going to see brisket sales increase even more," predicts Dave Zino, executive chef at NCBA.

On the pork side, at retail, shoulders were up 19.1% to \$418.1 million in sales for the year ended in April, says Nielsen data provided by the National Pork Board. Rib sales were up just 0.5% but held steady at \$1.65 billion. "Both are incredibly popular cuts for barbecuing,"

says Jason Menke, director of communications.

Pork belly has started to find its way into the basket, with a YOY sales increase of 31% to \$4.6 million for the year ended in April. "People are really drawn to that cut, using it for pork belly burnt ends," Menke says.

Don't discount poultry. National Turkey Federation has developed the Turkey Smoke barbecue competition featured at national events. "Turkey's ability to soak up flavors and the diversity of cuts makes it the perfect addition to any barbecue lineup," says Beth Breeding, vice president of communications & marketing at NTF.

## BEYOND BRISKET

**C**harlie McKenna is from South Carolina, he's cooked at fine dining restaurants in three cities, and now he's the owner and pitmaster at Lillie's Q in Chicago. Recently McKenna has embraced Texas-style, with a walk-up counter and nightly offerings of brisket, which used to be Tuesday-only. This, "even though I'm from the Carolinas," he says. "I'd never cooked a brisket until I was 20-something years old."

McKenna's favorite cut remains the whole pig, due to the challenges of evenly cooking all the cuts. And he appreciates the mix of barbecue styles found in Chicago. "We have these barbecue nuts, who are like, 'It can only be this way,'" he says, adding, "If you like Texas-style brisket with salt and pepper and that's it, great. If you want to take Korean barbecue and mix it with the smoky methods of the South, awesome."

McKenna has touched his Carolina roots with the latest in his line of sauces, sold at more than 7,000 retailers nationwide, while also appeasing consumers' health desires with a Zero Sugar Carolina Sauce. But his latest rub offering at retail? Brisket Pepper.

Brisket is also central for James Cruse, pitmaster at Central City BBQ in New Orleans, although like McKenna he offers the gamut of pulled pork, ribs and poultry. "Brisket is king," he says. "When a restaurant figures out brisket, they pound their chests about it." Cruse is also excited about experimenting with non-traditional cuts like thick-cut bacon and pork tenderloin, as well as ethnic flavors ranging from Mexican to Vietnamese. "If I get in something that's unique, I create a special around it," he says.

New and different items are also on the menu at the 500-plus-location Dickey's Barbecue Restaurants, which has recently rolled out pork burnt ends with a sweet sauce, smoked chicken wings, and a spicy pulled pork sandwich. Dickey's also has a new online store that sells hardwood pellets, spices and rubs, and barbecue sauce. "Burnt ends are definitely trending with barbecue followers, but offering pork instead of brisket is proving unique and popular," says Laura Dickey, company CEO.



## TRUE OR FALSE

**53.3%**  
of 337 respondents said  
the answer is true

### • THE ANSWER: **true** •

That the responses were almost half-and-half makes sense, however. According to the National Hot Dog and Sausage Council, Frankfurt is widely credited as the home of the hot dog, but many assert that the popular sausage was created in the late 1600s by Johann Georghehner, a butcher living in Coburg, Germany. By this account, Georghehner later traveled to Frankfurt to promote his new product.



Courtesy of Dickey's Barbecue Pit

Those who write about the world of barbecue say that while traditional fare still thrives, experimentation can be seen everywhere.

Ardie Davis, the author of 13 books on the subject and a columnist for *National Barbecue News*, sees more expensive beef like Wagyu and restaurants touting “craft barbecue.” “I don’t know that that’s been completely defined yet – but it’s going to cost more money,” he says. “In the middle you have guys who, instead of doing the expensive cuts, still get the traditional brisket, they just specify at the packing-house exactly how they want it.”

Barbecue is getting edgier, with dishes like Nashville hot fried chicken and Korean hot wings taking off, says Meathead Goldwyn, author of “Meathead: The Science of Great Barbecue and Grilling” and a blogger at *AmazingRibs.com*. He’s also seeing pork belly used for everything from banh mi to burnt ends.



Barbecued pork belly burnt ends

# THE BBQ BEAT

“We’re seeing a lot of fusion,” Goldwyn says. “A restaurant in Chicago might serve on the same menu Kansas City, Memphis, Carolina – and the public is starting to understand the differences.”

Steven Raichlen, host of the new TV show “Project Fire” (which launched July 4) and author of the “Brisket Chronicles,” says the traditional Texas meat has become globalized and more upscale. “You now find really good world-class brisket as far as Chicago, Boston, Paris, Berlin,” he says. “Americans are eating less beef, but we’re eating better beef. ... It’s not

super-sizing – I guess it would be super-upscaling.”

Barbecue joints known for traditional favorites have become open to influences like Asian, Tex-Mex or Cajun, says Daniel Vaughn, barbecue editor at *Texas Monthly* and co-author of the recently released “Whole Hog Barbecue.” Vaughn sees similarities between Texas and North Carolina styles. “That might seem crazy given the difference in proteins,” he says. “But barbecue fans in both states give a lot of value to all-wood cooking. I don’t think that’s the case in Kansas City or Memphis or anywhere else.”

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