

HOW WE SERVE

TRENDS

HELPING YOU TAKE ACTION

THE SOW FACTOR: BACON'S EXCITING MENU EFFECT



For years, **bacon** has been a beloved ingredient in the United States: more than 266.5 million Americans **consumed it in 2019** alone. Their love for it seems to know no bounds, in fact.

When Chef and Co-Owner Randy Tozzie opened Bakn's first location in metropolitan Pittsburgh in 2015, he knew

RECENT TRENDS

- **The Sow Factor: Bacon's Exciting Menu Effect**
- **Foodservice in a Post-Pandemic World**
- **What the "New Normal" for Foodservice May Look Like**
- **Course Correction - How Technology Is Reshaping Foodservice**
- **How to Delight Health-Conscious Consumers: Diversify Your Menu with These On-Trend Recipes**

he'd need to have plenty of bacon and other ingredients on hand to make the hearty dishes that populate the menu. But customer demand for the restaurant's bacon-infused dishes—such as its bacon flights of Sriracha, barbecue and other flavored strips—was even more than he anticipated.

"It was just ridiculous how much I underestimated the people of Pittsburgh and their love for bacon," Tozzie says. "I thought 100 to 200 pounds was good enough; it would last me two days. I called the supplier every other day until I eventually said, 'Just double the bacon order.'"

Tozzie's experience is hardly unique. According to Datassential's latest SNAP! data, bacon appears on 71% of all U.S. menus, with a menu versatility score of 72 (out of 100) and a food versatility score of 98. It's most commonly used in American cuisine, accounting for more than a third of all menu appearances across all dayparts, with hot sandwiches (11.3% of total incidences), pizza (11.2%), cold sandwiches (10.4%), burgers (10.4%) and combos (8.9%) accounting for the top five applications of the ingredient.

Datassential's Food Studio tool also signals bacon's power to elevate consumer interest in some (but not all) menu items. As reported in the [June 2020 issue of FoodBytes](#), a BBQ cheeseburger has strong appeal; simply adding bacon boosts its appeal to "very strong" status. (The market research firm cautions, however, that Food Studio's machine learning engine "takes a lot of variables into account, so you can't just add ... bacon to *anything* and boost the appeal score.")

TRENDS BY TAG

- [Farm Promise](#)
- [Flavor Trends](#)
- [MUFSO](#)
- [Cutters](#)
- [labor costs](#)

[See all](#)

Given bacon's consumer appeal, it's a prime target for operator upselling, elevating check averages by a few cents or even a few dollars. The Greene Turtle, for example, adds 50 cents to the check if a guest wishes to add bacon to an item, while Del Taco charges 60 cents for the addition. An upcharge in the \$1 to \$1.50 range is fairly common, as seen at Pepperjax Grill (99 cents to select the "You Had Me at Bacon" add-on), PDQ (\$1 for bacon plus another \$1 for "extra bacon"), Mooyah (\$1.29), and Jersey Mike's and Newk's Eatery (\$1.50).

Some operators even offer guests the choice of what *kind* of bacon they want. For instance, instead of regular bacon, operators can substitute thick-cut or flavored bacon or even bacon lardons as a topping.

Bacon is especially big business for bacon-themed restaurants, which seize upon the ingredient's savory appeal by specializing in it. The fatty, salty cured pork has been an integral part of Farmer Boys' menu since the fast casual chain's inception nearly 40 years ago, according to Vice President and Chief Marketing Officer Larry Rusinko.

Farmer Boys promotes bacon's inclusion in dishes through in-store signage, TV advertising, social media and other PR efforts, according to Rusinko, who says most offerings that contain bacon—such as the Bacon Boy, a double cheeseburger topped with two thick, hickory-smoked bacon strips—tend to become popular orders soon after they're introduced. The chain also allows guests to add bacon to dishes that don't already contain the ingredient—for an additional \$1.49.

"Bacon in our menu items most certainly draws customer

interest,” Rusinko reports. “It fits very well with our concept because it highlights our commitment to high-quality, cooked-to-order food.”

With the right marketing and menu strategies, you can make bacon sizzle in your restaurant too.

Spreading the Bacon Love

In addition to occasional bacon-themed promotions, Farmer Boys last year held an online [search for a bacon intern](#). Contestants were asked to post a video to Instagram explaining why they’d be the best person to sample bacon menu items for a day and rate strips for flavor and thickness.

The company, which received photos, songs, poems and videos from contenders, was blown away by the response. “Our objectives were to highlight bacon; create a fun, experiential way to celebrate bacon; and engage our guests,” Rusinko says. “We had entries from all ages and geographic locations. The promotion helped us engage fans while reaching a new audience that wasn’t familiar with the Farmer Boys brand.”

Because bacon is sometimes regarded as an indulgent element, highlighting its presence in dishes—and showcasing the visual appeal of strips served on their own—can be an effective marketing technique.

Tozzie—who initially set up tastings with suppliers to ensure he’d be able to get a bacon product that offered the right shrinkage, size, fat content and thickness—has found that social media typically yields the best results because consumers like to engage with mouthwatering

photos of menu items and ingredients.

“We tried some radio; it didn't really generate more traffic,” Tozzie says. “Nothing really has [gotten] traction as well as social media. If I post a picture of me holding up two pork belly portions, it gets a lot of play. It’s about tagging your friends to say, ‘We’ve got to try this.’ There’s an immediate response.”

An Adaptable Ingredient

While bacon traditionally has been treated primarily as a breakfast item or sandwich topping, the foodservice industry in the past two decades has developed numerous ways to expand its use, according to Chris DuBois, senior vice president of the protein practice at market research company IRI.

“You see bacon in literally every part of the meal—all the way from cocktails through appetizers and desserts,” DuBois says. “Bacon is one of those ultimately flexible proteins that can go in upscale restaurants and fast food, help create excitement, and drive a lot of traffic.”

But bacon isn’t always an ideal addition to every dish; despite the restaurant’s name, for instance, Bakn only incorporates it into dishes when it will add notable scent, taste and/or texture, according to Tozzie. The ingredient shines especially bright in Bakn’s bacon-infused honey, maple and brown sugar jam, which is spread on the eatery’s buttermilk biscuits, and in its one-pound BLT, where the applewood-smoked bacon complements the flavors of the other ingredients.

“It’s a fatty piece of meat and it’s cured; it’s really going

to coat your tongue and mouth because of that little bit of grease on there,” Tozzie explains. “The BLT has arugula and tomato; that amount of acidity with the peppered bacon cuts it enough that it is just spectacular. It almost elevates the flavor.”

Because it’s versatile enough to be part of a breakfast omelet one second and an addition to gourmet popcorn the next, the foodservice industry’s approach to bacon is becoming more innovative by the day, according to DuBois, who says consumers as a result are starting to feel more comfortable trying new bacon-centric recipes at home too.

“The creativity from the foodservice side is just exploding—you get beer-battered snacks, cocktails with bacon; it seems like it could be in anything,” he concludes. “The key to bacon’s success is that it’s just so flexible. The smell and taste are so good that people want to be creative with it, because they know their customers will like it.”

Interested in other pork products that are popular with consumers? Discover the [specific types diners crave](#).

Topics: [pork](#), [merchandising and marketing](#), [culinary](#), [recipe ideas](#), [operations](#), [menu strategy and profitability](#), [recipe and ingredients innovation](#), [formats](#), [cuts](#), [flavors](#), [upselling](#)

CLEMENS

FOOD GROUP

FOODSERVICE

Based in Hatfield, PA, Clemens Food Group is a sixth-generation, family owned company dedicated to providing service and brand solutions that help our customers grow their businesses. Clemens is a vertically coordinated company that includes hog farming, food production, and transportation. We are committed to building a foundation for future generations. It is what we call 'doing business the right way.' It is who we are.

800.523.5291

1

2700 CLEMENS ROAD
P.O. BOX 902
HATFIELD, PA 19440-0902

CONTACT US

in

OUR
COMMITMENT
YOUR
BUSINESS
TRENDS
MENU IDEAS
PRODUCTS
INNOVATION

FAMILY SITES

CFG CORPORATE
HATFIELD QUALITY
MEATS
FARM PROMISE
CFG COLDWATER

CFG CAREERS