

## MARKETS

By JoAnn Alumbaugh

### ALL ABOARD FOR BACON

This runaway train keeps picking up speed.

What is it that makes bacon so irresistible? Is it the juicy, salty, savory taste? Is it the chewy crunchiness? Or is it the comfort food we just can't get enough of, whether with our eggs and toast, on our BLTs and burgers or in hundreds of other foods?

Whatever the reason, bacon is a boon to the pork industry. Bacon sales in the United States have increased in each of the last four years, according to Information Resources, Inc. (IRI), a Chicago-based market research firm. In 2013 alone, sales climbed 9.5 percent to an all-time high of nearly \$4 billion.

The National Provisioner, a trade publication that tracks the meat business, gave details in "The Bacon Report," written by Megan Pellegrini last summer. Drew Lericos, senior brand manager for Farmland Foods based in Kansas City, Mo., was quoted as saying, "Currently, 69 percent of all bacon sold in the U.S. is through foodservice outlets. Foodservice bacon sales have posted a 3 to 4 percent

annual growth rate since 2007, which is expected to continue through 2013 and beyond. Within foodservice, over 67 percent of all restaurants include bacon on their menus."

A survey by Smithfield Foods even found that 65 percent of Americans would support the idea of making bacon our "national food."

"It's a bacon nation, and we just live in it," declares The National Provisioner.

Charles Passy writes Market-Watch for The Wall Street Journal. He recently reported, "This never-ending bacon boom has taken many forms, beginning with the sheer varieties of strip bacon now on the market—thick-cut, thin-cut, specialty smoked, peppered, you name it. Smithfield, for example, has recently added cherry wood and apple wood-smoked and sea salt-flavored varieties to its lineup. There's also a growing do-it-yourself movement in bacon, with chefs—or just plain bacon freaks—making their own. (All it takes is a slab of pork belly, a little brine and some time in the smoker.)"

Food Network chefs rave about bacon, using thick, greasy slabs of it in their gourmet dishes. There was even an "all-bacon-basket" episode of "Chopped," the popular show that gives four chefs each a basket of diverse and sometimes bizarre ingredients that they turn into delectable appetizers, main dishes and desserts.

#### Diverse Appeal

Few foods have been used in as many creative ways as bacon: picture bacon roses, bacon dresses, chocolate-covered bacon, bacon-flavored vodka, bacon ice cream, cupcakes, gum, and on and on. You can even put your bacon in a bowl made of bacon! Scott Boilen, the "As Seen on TV" marketing aficionado introduced the "Bacon Bowl" through a series of infomercials in late 2013. Boilen's Allstar Products Group sold more than two million units of the \$10.99 Bacon Bowl, rivaling the suc-

cess of another of his well-known, "As Seen on TV" products: the Sruggie.

Never underestimate the power of bacon, says Boilen: "It's almost become a cultlike food."

Bacon has adapted well to the foodie culture of the last decade, perhaps because it's so multidimensional. Passy quotes chef Kyle Rourke of the Red Star Tavern, Portland, Ore. in his article: "Need some fat to balance an acidic dish? Bacon.



Need something salty to balance the sweet? Bacon."

#### Bacon Festivals Abound

From Atlanta to Ann Arbor, Des Moines to Denver, bacon lovers convene to celebrate their favorite food. You'll find bacon queens, bacon-eating contests and all sorts of other delicacies featuring bacon. In Des Moines, thousands of tickets sell out in minutes. And don't forget the Bacon Film Festival that was held in New York last year.

There are even bacon-themed restaurants in New York and Chicago. No doubt about it—bacon is America's guilty pleasure. Eat, enjoy, and bless the bacon train as it continues its whistle-stop tour across the country. **PN**



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