



La Nova workers (from left) look over cases of chicken wings which are prepared in the Buffalo, NY, restaurant's big grill.

Buffalo Wings

flying high at pizza restaurants everywhere

Foodservice chicken sales increased 6.5 percent last year to \$11.8 billion. Per capita consumption of chicken increased for the 13th straight year, according to most recent data from the USDA. In fact, consumption of both chicken and pizza have climbed steadily side-by-side, year after year, according to *Restaurants & Institutions*.

Aside from using chickens as a topping, a La California Pizza Kitchen, Buffalo Wings have become all the rage from coast-to-coast at operations from pizzerias to sports bars. They remain one of the biggest selling and most popular value added menu items.

The country's top pizza independent, La Nova Pizzeria of Buffalo, NY, has made waves with its wings. On the chain level, it is estimated that Domino's of Ann Arbor, MI, sells some 10 million wings a week. And both Little Caesars and Pizza Hut are selling wings.

But smaller operations like Gramma's Pizza, a carry-out operation in Sonoma, CA, are flying high with its special brand of wings and sauce, according to owner Jim Cahoon.

"We started selling Buffalo Wings a little over a year ago. There's a lot of public interest in them. Where there's a natural exposure to something...it's a goldmine."

Cahoon and his wife, Angie, go through between one and two cases (10 lb. cases) a week. They sell "about \$50 a day" in Buffalo Wings.

"We're using pressure marinated chickens. They have great flavor by themselves, compared to plain chicken," Cahoon explained. "We also use real butter and Tapatia Sauce, which lends a spicy, rich taste."

"When we serve it, the wings are on one side

[of the carry out box] and the celery sticks are on the other, with room for a 4 ounce serving cup of sauce. We sell 10 pieces for \$3.99," which is comparable to what Domino's sells, according to Cahoon.

"It took two weeks before customers harassed us into offering a larger order (15 pieces for \$5.99)," he added.

Cahoon points to the spiciness of Buffalo Wings as a main reason for their popularity among customers at pizza establishments. "Buffalo Wings offer a more intense type flavor."

Another plus is that the compact type Buffalo Wing fits in with the nation's casual dining craze.

"People are as apt to order Buffalo Wings along with ravioli or spaghetti," Cahoon continued. Cahoon and Gramma's Pizza will take the Buffalo craze a step further at Pizza Expo next month when they will introduce Buffalo Chips.

"We take a 6-inch mini pizza skin. After doctoring the crust, we put K-Paul's Herbal Spice blend on it, and cut it like tortilla chips, and serve it with a choice of sauces."

Cahoon does not see any end to the craze.

"I think the interest is gonna continue to be great," he predicted. "If a product is done right, people will rave about it. You don't have to hype a good product."

Named after Buffalo, NY, where they were reportedly invented at a local restaurant, the wings have spread all over the country since then.

La Nova Pizzeria, which has been in business since 1957, earned renown during the

Buffalo Bills' consecutive runs to the Super Bowl by sending its wings all over North America. Vice President Joe Todaro Jr. points out that while La Nova did not originate the Buffalo Wing, it is famous for introducing the Bar-B-Q Chicken Wings, which continue to sell big. Customers have traveled as far away as Canada, Pennsylvania and New York City for the wings. La Nova even express mails its "heat 'n eat" product to California.

Available in hot & spicy and Bar-B-Q, the wings can be cooked in conventional, pizza deck, conveyor and microwave ovens. La Nova's barbeque grill handles 1,000 wings at a time.

Back in 1989, Todaro noticed that in Buffalo 95 percent of the pizzerias carried Buffalo Wings on their menus, while the same was not true in the rest of the nation. Two years later, La Nova Wings, Inc., was created with one goal in mind: to take its wings over America.

By 1994, La Nova had achieved a good deal of success and press coverage with its wings. It was not too much later that both Domino's and Pizza Hut introduced its Buffalo Wings products.

In addition to servicing its area clientele with 15,000 pounds of wings a week (more than any other establishment in Buffalo), La Nova supplies wings to Papa's Pizza To Go in Atlanta; Perky's Pizza of Florida, Connie's, Nancy's and Jake's in Chicago; Peter Piper of Tucson; Pinocchio's Pizza of Texas; and Hungry Howie's Pizza & Subs stores on the West Coast.

With pizzerias everywhere now jumping on the Buffalo Wing bandwagon, it does not seem like America's love affair with chicken will end anytime soon.