

Cooking out is taking off

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Source: Coleman Natural Foods

KANSAS CITY, MO. – Over the past two years, the pandemic has required that people stay home more than ever, and that meant consumers cooking a lot more of their own meals. Not surprisingly, many turned to grilling, especially during the typical summer grilling season, and interest in the meats being used rose substantially.

According to data from Nielsen, last year saw strong demand for barbecue-related cuts of meat, and there's little reason to expect this trend to slow. Retail sales of cuts like ribs, shoulders and briskets rose 26% from year-over-year levels, compared to the overall fresh meats category, which rose 11%.

Another recent study from The Hartman Group revealed that grilling/barbecuing was one of the most improved or acquired cooking skills during the pandemic.

“Grilling is seeing a continued interest with consumers,” said Damita Crouse, consumer insights manager at Hormel Foods Corp., Austin, Minn. “Grills themselves are also changing with the emergence of indoor grills. They made it easier for consumers to achieve grilled

flavors any time of year and without any special knowledge on how to make a fire, whether to use wood or charcoal, tend a grill, weather and other considerations.”

Sarah Findle, director of marketing and communications for Coleman Natural Foods, Westminster, Colo., noted budgets continue to be tightened in an uncertain economy and today’s shoppers want to make sure they are buying quality food they feel good about feeding their family—and many have turned toward meats for the grill for dinner options.

“When supplies on the shelf were low, people bought sausages, hot dogs and other cuts of meat they normally would not have,” she said. “This unexpected trial has resulted in consumers understanding that natural sausages and grilling meats made with clean ingredients are a great source of protein, provide great taste and can be used for multiple eating occasions.”

When it comes to grilling, consumers have generally grown more comfortable with food preparation in the last couple of years.

“That confidence has resulted in an increased desire for experimentation, especially with more premium cuts of meat,” said Britney Banuelos, senior brand manager of fresh meats for Springdale, Ark.-based Tyson Foods. “They may feel better prepared to cook cuts of meat they previously only purchased at restaurants, for example. For many, backyard barbecues will also feel a little more special this year, so they may want to indulge a little during gatherings.”

Plenty of choices

Grilling has become a very social experience with hordes of weekend barbecuers and professional pitmasters alike sharing images on social accounts of their world-class burgers, tips on how to cook the perfect steak and images of family and friends cooking out.

“Whether you’re Bobby Flay with 1.7 million Instagram followers or your barbecue-loving brother-in-law with 32 followers, sharing grilling content and the grilling lifestyle on social media is exploding,” said Sarah Crowley, director of marketing for Verde Farms, Woburn, Mass. “Beyond grilling tips and recipe inspiration, we also know that consumers frequently look to these channels to consume educational content about cuts and categories of meat, which very much influences preferences and purchase decisions.”

The company has seen consumer interest in premium products like organic, 100% grass-fed beef burgers rise tremendously over the years.

“Since 2017, sales revenue for fresh pre-made beef burgers have doubled and unit sales are up 80%,” said Dana Ehrlich, founder and CEO of Verde Farms. “Burgers with inclusions are seeing tremendous growth including bacon cheddar, jalapeno and pepper jack, and steakhouse pre-made burgers with sales increasing 20% in just the past year.”

Tyson Foods offers a robust portfolio of fresh meats brands, including its Chairman's Reserve Platinum Angus, a USDA Upper 1/3 Choice offering that delivers a superior barbecue experience for novices and experienced grill masters alike.

“When it comes to grilling specifically, popular barbecue cuts have outpaced other fresh meats sales,” Banuelos said. “On the beef side, roasts including chuck roast, round roast and loin roast, as well as brisket, are most popular for barbecue.”

Hormel Foods' Jennie-O Turkey Store and Applegate Farms-brand hot dogs and burgers and its Hormel Pork Tenderloin products both saw increased interest the past two years, with Crouse noting they are perfect for any type of grill and offer consumers choices beyond the typical grilling options.

As grilling season approaches, Coleman Natural Foods will be suggesting new preparation styles and recipe ideas to help consumers make meals and gatherings even more memorable.

“We want to inspire people to go ‘beyond the bun’ with recipes like hot dog fried rice, and Chicago dog salad,” Findle said. “Beyond the typical backyard grilling occasion, we are sharing these inspiring recipes and different ways to stretch a single pack of sausages over a few meals that will help consumers get creative not only in the kitchen, but in stretching their budgets as well. Creativity and resourcefulness will be the name of the game.”

For instance, Coleman Natural all-beef hot dogs and Budweiser BBQ collection bratwurst have been popular items enjoyed from Memorial Day to Labor Day and beyond.

“The 12-oz. 8-pack is big enough to feed a crowd, or to have leftovers you can incorporate into creative meals throughout the week,” Findle said. “Our Budweiser BBQ bratwurst and pulled pork featuring our all-natural crate free pork and the iconic Budweiser lager beer taste will be grilling favorites thanks to their classic flavors and simple grill and eat preparation.”

Seeing sales growth

Merchandising is key for success in the category, so Banuelos recommends that retailers clearly identify which cuts in the meat case grill well through instore displays, online descriptions and even on-pack. For those that have the resources, she noted they should consider cooking demonstrations to further engage and inspire.

“From our end, we deeply value our partnership with our barbecue ambassadors,” Banuelos said. “These award-winning pitmasters understand the quality behind our Chairman's Reserve brand, and we understand the value that they bring to our consumers, offering tips, tricks and recipes to guide them wherever they are in their barbecue journey.”

To appeal to the convenience-minded and the connoisseur barbecue fans, retailers should offer both high-quality cuts of meat as well as fully cooked convenience items.

“Positioning both in a single display can offer the best of both worlds for those looking for a smoky solution in hours or minutes,” Findle said.

Barbecue lovers may enter a store searching for a specific meat brand or cut to complete a recipe, and a retailer can help guide busy consumers to side dishes, rubs and seasonings, and meat toppings that help their meal come together.

“A popular accessory to hanging out by the grill and preparing a delicious meal in the heat of the summer is a cold beer,” Findle said. “Consider displaying beer near the BBQ section. Our Budweiser BBQ Collection offers the best of both worlds and the Budweiser red really draws the eye, and the appetite.”

So, even for Americans returning to office after working from home, barbecue should continue to be a way to reconnect with friends and relax.

“Many consumers are ready to welcome family and friends this year, and now that they have a new set of grilling skills, what better way to reconnect than through barbecue, which has long been one of America’s favorite pastimes,” Banuelos said.

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