



Restaurant industry in review

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Allowing for regional tastes doesn't have to be sacrificed just because a restaurant is part of a franchised chain. Here's one creative idea on how to meet the demand for all seasonings.

## Hot and sassy Famous Dave's tastes likes home

By Tom Crain

It's often said that barbecue is perhaps the most pure, bipartisan force in America today. Mention authentic barbecue, however, and the lines are drawn between North and South, with most people considering it a Southern specialty.

But the growth of a Minnesota-based barbecue franchise, Famous Dave's, is proving that Northerners know a thing or two about hot-and-sassy sauces and spicy meats. The concept currently has 40 company-owned and 98 franchised restaurants in 34 states, with development agreements in place for 171 new locations.

There are more than 10,000 barbecue restaurants located throughout the U.S., according to Prepared

Foods magazine, so how is Famous Dave's competing in such a regionalized market?

For one thing, it borrows what it considers the best from the top barbecue regions in the U.S. and features them on an eclectic barbecue menu. Rather than offering a couple of varieties of sauces, five or more sauces, representing the top flavors of regional barbecue, are placed on the table enabling patrons to flavor their meat according to their personal tastes. To support the brand, the proprietary sauces are sold in upper Midwest grocery and gourmet cooking stores, and food Web sites.

"Our menu consists of some of the best barbecue traditions in America: Beef brisket from Texas, chopped

pork from Georgia, and St. Louis-style ribs," boasts Glenn Drasher, vice president of marketing.

Dave Anderson, founder of Famous Dave's, spent 25 years perfecting the art of barbecue before he opened his first restaurant in 1994. He visited every Southern rib shack, roadside joint, hole-in-the-wall and snooty supper club he could find to sample and identify the flavors he liked. He then returned to his Minneapolis home to use a converted backyard garbage can as a smoker and his kitchen stove to reconstruct the recipes.

Today, as chairman emeritus, Anderson and his procedure have been replaced by an experienced R&D team of six in a state-of-the-art test kitchen at the concept's headquarters. "We have all of the equipment used in our restaurants, as well as the ability to bring in new pieces of equipment for testing: two smokers, a broiler, fryer, ovens and stovetops," says Judy Koehn, director of R&D.

The R&D team is currently working on the development of a North Carolina dip sauce. The typical development time for a new menu item or sauce takes about nine to 18 months, Koehn says. Here's how the process works:

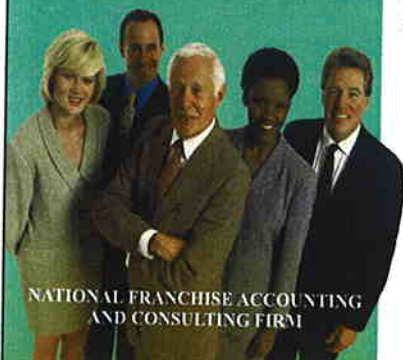
The team first educates itself by reading all the history books, cookbooks, guides and Web sites they can get their hands on about the region. Next, they visit several authentic restaurants in the region that feature the item and talk to the owners/chefs responsible for cooking it. They then purchase the sauces, ingredients, and/or seasonings available locally and bring them back to the test kitchen. Finally, they reconstruct the sauce through a sensory (taste, touch, smell and sight) evaluation.

"A typical traveling group assisting us in developing a new sauce usually consists of a couple R & D



Famous Dave's provides the ribs, you add the sauce.

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staff members, vendor partner chefs and franchise owners," says Koehn. "The owners/chefs of the local barbecue establishments like to talk about their recipes. We are not a threat to the authentic barbecue mom-and-pops. We do not have restaurants in the same trade areas."

Drasher adds that expanding the regional barbecue dishes Famous Dave's offers is a never-ending process. "We utilize (regional) barbecue traditions of meat, smoke, and sauce to introduce three to four special promos on our menu throughout the year," says Drasher. "The heroes of these promotions then become menu staples."

## THE SEVEN RECOGNIZED REGIONS OF BBQ

**Eastern North Carolina:** Pit-cooked chopped or sliced pig with peppery vinegar sauce.

**Western North Carolina:** Uses the same type of meat as Eastern, but douses it in a sauce rich with vinegar and tomatoes.

**South Carolina:** Slow-cooked pork, hand-pulled or shredded, doused in yellow mustard sauce.

**West Kentucky:** Mutton with a vinegar and tomato-based sauce with a mixture of spice and sweetness.

**Memphis:** Pulled pork, slow-cooked, shredded by hand, and then doused with sweet tomato sauce flavored with pepper and molasses. The ribs are cooked with dry rubs; sauce is added after the meat is cooked.

**Kansas City:** Pork and beef seasoned with a dry rub or wet marinade and then cooked over hickory wood. Extra sauce, with a tomato and molasses flavor, is then added.

**Texas:** Beef—brisket is most popular—cooked over a slow mesquite fire. Sauce, used as a marinade, is added just before the meat is done. The sauce is flavored with chilies and limes and other Mexican-style ingredients.

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