



## What You Need to Know to Profit from Consumer's Insatiable Appetite for Chicken



### The versatility of chicken is the secret to success.

The World Economic Forum estimates that roughly 50 billion chickens went to dinner in 2018 and didn't come back.<sup>1</sup>

We don't know exactly how that translates into total servings, but we do know people in the U.S. ate nearly **4 billion fried chicken sandwiches in 2019.**<sup>2</sup>

That was the year of the Chicken Sandwich Wars, in which some of the largest quick-service restaurant (QSR) brands took turns flaming each other on social media after people apparently went nuts over the new chicken fillet sandwich from Popeye's, which they also ran out of after two weeks.

That says a lot about the growing popularity of chicken, and about the opportunities and challenges it presents for operators. Per capita consumption of chicken has been rising steadily for decades and recently passed pork to become the number one animal-based protein consumed worldwide, while both beef and pork have declined slightly. The same is true in the U.S., although the rate of increase has been much more dramatic over the past 10 years.<sup>3</sup>



# You've Got This!

The Essential Ingredient to Consistently Legendary Chicken

There are good reasons why chicken is so popular around the world.

- For hungry customers, chicken is an inexpensive, widely available source of protein
- It is generally perceived to be healthier than either beef or pork
- There are no religious or cultural proscriptions to speak of
- And in the dwindling number of places that large-scale poultry suppliers and chain restaurants do not reach, chickens are happily and easily raised on small farms and in backyards

Most of these reasons are the same ones that make pork and beef popular, too. Perhaps a better question is, "Why has chicken been increasing in popularity compared to other meats?"

The answer is *variety*.

There are so many ways you can cook chicken. The partnering of global QSR brands with innovative foodservice equipment manufacturers has accelerated the systemization

of machines and methods for the entire industry. That's a fancy way of saying that today, anyone in the foodservice business can add chicken to their menu and make money doing it.

*Menu variety links consumers and outlets.* It's easy enough to see on the surface. Consumer preferences drive menu ideas and store concepts, while the ease with which chicken items can be added to the menu increases its popularity. That was

the real lesson of the chicken sandwich wars: Social media aside, the demand for something new to try was neatly exposed.

## Just so many ways to cook chicken

So how many ways are there to cook chicken? Someday we may actually figure that out. And by then, there will be more.

Let's at least try to break it down.



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Start with the bird itself, since that illustrates the versatility of the supply chain and relates directly to the menu:

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- Whole roasted, as in roto bird (also to cook/cut/serve)
- Eight-piece, bone-in, deep fried or baked
- Boneless breast for grilling
- Tenders/strips/fingers (from breast or tenderloin), deep-fried
- Wings, bone-in or "boneless" (breast cuts or small tenders,) deep fried or baked
- Nuggets (tenderloin + various)
- On its way to the menu, chicken can also start out fresh, frozen, frozen pre-breaded, fresh breaded, or shredded



Next, let's look at popular cooking methods, since that relates directly to equipment investment and menu or concept differentiation:

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- **Pressure fried**  
Mostly for fresh-breaded, eight-piece, bone-in but also boneless breasts, wings or tenders equipped with smoke boxes for genuine (not just sauced) smoked and barbecue halves, quarters and wings.
- **Open fried**  
Depends on the fryer. Traditional open vats can handle fresh breaded bone-in and are used especially for extra-crispy texture. Lower capacity, oil-saving vats are the better choice for frozen and pre-breaded frozen products with less fall-off during cooking.
- **Baked or roasted in a combi oven**  
Cooking versatility and load capacity make combis excellent for traditional "homestyle" or rotisserie style whole birds. Some are also
- **Rotisserie**  
Immensely popular
- **Grilled on a charbroiler, griddle or in combi oven**  
Combi ovens provide operator control for high-temperature/low-humidity grilling.
- **Stir fried on stovetop, charbroiler or in combi oven**  
More combi versatility

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Versatility begets variation. It's how we end up with signature items like barbecue chicken pizza, white chicken chile, chicken mac & cheese, or Cajun chicken & sausage gumbo.

Then there's taste and style. This is where cooking methods meet flavor and texture enhancements such as breadings, seasonings and marinades to produce identifiable favorites and signature menu items:

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- Breading textures: soft Southern fried, extra crispy, tempura battered
- Breading seasoning profile: mild to spicy hot
- Marinades for flavoring roast or grilled
- Herb-seasoned, charred, sauced, smoked



Finally, there are several ways any of these variations can appear on the menu:

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- Entrée or meal
- As a sandwich on a bun or a wrap  
So many kinds, from pretzel buns to lettuce wraps
- As a single snack or multi-packs  
Think nuggets and buckets.
- Appetizers, sides, soups, salad toppers  
An efficient way for delis and "fresh" concepts to profit on leftovers from prepping whole birds on-site

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When you combine the growing popularity of chicken with its nearly endless variations, you get a field of opportunity for foodservice operators that runs far and wide.



If you haven't been to Cracker Barrel in the last couple of years (or ever), you might be surprised to learn the venerable country store-themed chain recently added bone-in fried chicken to its Southern-style menu for the first time.



Wendy's was once considered a hamburger chain. Their new Classic Chicken Sandwich is the fifteenth chicken sandwich on its menu. Chicken McNuggets from McDonald's are the stuff of legend, but of chicken sandwiches there was just one until last year. More are on the way.



Chicken-only chains like KFC and Chick-fil-A tend to focus on a core lineup, while constantly tinkering around the edges in an effort to stay fresh and compete with signature-item upstarts. One of the fastest-growing QSRs in the country is a 530+ unit chain called Raising Cane's. It not only cooks nothing but chicken, it only cooks one kind of chicken — freshly breaded fried chicken fingers to order — and only one flavor and style.



Chicken has long been at home in stores across the country. C-stores have been growing in size, both with gasoline pump makeovers and expanding store footprints. Additional space lets operators to get a bit more sophisticated with their fresh food offerings by co-branding QSR express concepts or developing their own system. They may not have room to do it all, but as we have seen, they don't really need to.



Fried chicken has been getting a lot of press lately. But rotisserie chicken has been a staple of grocery delis and "fresh" casual chains like Boston Market for decades. Grilled chicken for sandwiches, salads, wraps and Tex-Mex has been around even longer. By migrating to combi ovens for whole bird production, full-menu delis can serve up rotisserie and grilled chicken to go with fried, while using the combi for cooking other menu items, as well.

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There is good money in good chicken. Widespread popularity and profitability go hand in hand. Most of the reasons chicken is so popular among consumers are the same reasons that foodservice operators are able to make good money serving it. Variety results in fans loyal to certain tastes. Broader trends, like the popularity of chicken sandwiches as an alternative to burgers, or the growing preference for boneless products like tenders for finger food, offer fertile ground for building traffic.

Operationally, there are good reasons why chicken programs make money.

## Product cost

Chicken is profitable because the product itself is low-cost (compared to beef and fish) and equipment and supply programs are highly systemized. The poultry supply chain is well organized. You can get just about any chicken product in any form delivered anywhere, any day of the week.

## Operations

Reputable equipment partners and distributors provide training, service, support and consumable supplies.

Operating efficiency is mostly a matter of lining up the right parts in the right way. Cracker Barrel discovered this when Henny Penny helped them to launch a delicious fried chicken dinner by matching a high-volume pressure fryer that anyone can use with a humidified holding cabinet to maintain quality and manage throughput.

## Holding

Cooked chicken holds quite well under the right conditions. Holding is a key component to chicken profitability because it reduces throw-aways while offering the potential to cook in batches ahead of time and serve more customers during peak meal periods.

## Margins

Chicken lets you flex your core menu by adding premium-priced items with higher margins.

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## Life is better with the right partner

The world is showing chicken a lot of love, these days. You don't have to believe the statistics. Just look around at the menus and TV commercials. If you aren't cooking chicken, you probably should be.

If you do have chicken on the menu, it's a good time to freshen up the choices and evaluate your system. Do you have the right equipment? Are you making enough money? Are you losing traffic to competitors? Are you getting the service and support you deserve? Are you by any chance looking for a partner that's been helping the world's largest chains to serve chicken for more than 60 years?

Henny Penny is that partner. We *are* the chicken experts. Just ask KFC, Chick-fil-A, Wendy's, McDonald's, Zaxby's... [and more here](#). We do it all — equipment, accessories, breadings and seasonings — basically, everything but the bird. We also have what no one else in the industry can offer: a global network of distributors dedicated to the Henny Penny brand and supporting your efforts, day in and day out, with all the parts and service you'll ever need.

Look for more from *You've Got This!* It's our way of discussing all the ways that chicken continues to grow in popularity, how to make money at it, and why chicken will continue to flourish in a time of rapid change in the foodservice business.

### — *Your friends at Henny Penny*

For more information about Henny Penny products and service, please visit [hennypenny.com](http://hennypenny.com) or call 800 417 8417.

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Sources

<sup>1</sup> [weforum.org/agenda/2019/02/chart-of-the-day](http://weforum.org/agenda/2019/02/chart-of-the-day)

<sup>2</sup> [npd.com/wps/portal/npd/us/news/press-releases/2019](http://npd.com/wps/portal/npd/us/news/press-releases/2019)

<sup>3</sup> [data.oecd.org/agroutput/meat-consumption.htm](http://data.oecd.org/agroutput/meat-consumption.htm)

