

Demand for Italian Beef Is Booming. Thank ‘The Bear.’

The FX series has fueled a spike in sales of the sandwich at Chicago-specialty restaurants across the country.

By Rachel Sherman Aug. 9, 2022 NYT

Last month, Dan Michaels, an owner of Gino’s East of Chicago in Los Angeles, watched as orders for Italian beef — the classic Chicago sandwich of thinly sliced roast beef and tangy giardiniera piled on a roll — suddenly soared to 300 a day, from 150 a day in June.

“The Bear” had struck again.

The cross-talking, anxiety-inducing series from FX about a struggling Chicago beef sandwich shop and its harried kitchen brigade has drawn acclaim from food media and restaurant veterans, propelled a slew of “Yes, Chef!” memes gushing over the lead actor, Jeremy Allen White, and energized a collective lust for sweaty line cooks.

The show has also spurred instant demand for the delectably sloppy Italian beef sandwiches at the center of the plot’s chaos. Search interest on Google, according to Google Trends, nearly doubled after the show was released on Hulu on June 23, and Chicago-style restaurants across the country are feeling the effects in person.



Mike Klaersch, the owner of the Pizza Man, a mom-and-pop Chicago joint outside Kansas City, Kan., noticed customers piling in for the sandwiches. The restaurant, he said, sold five to six times as many as it did in June.

Jarret Kerr, an owner of Dog Day Afternoon, a Chicago Italian beef and hot dog restaurant in Windsor Terrace, Brooklyn, said he had seen at least a 50 percent increase in orders of hot Italian beef sandwiches — at \$15, the most expensive item on the menu — since the show debuted. The cramped shop used to sell up to a dozen a day; the staff is now slinging 30 or more a day and selling out daily.

“It’s been a godsend,” Mr. Kerr said. “Now every day we say, well, thank you to ‘The Bear,’ thank you to ‘The Bear.’”

The shop was name-checked last month on “Late Night With Seth Meyers” when Mr. Meyers and the actor Mr. White, who stars as Carmy in the series, took bites of its Italian beef sandwich. (A “Late Night” intern snagged the last two sandwiches before the shop sold out for the day, Mr. Kerr said.)

Goldbelly, an e-commerce company that delivers specialties like lobster rolls and gumbo from restaurants around the country, has seen a 30 percent increase in sales of Italian beef sandwiches since “The Bear” premiered, a spokeswoman for the company said. (That number could soon rise with the recent addition of the Chicago staple Al’s Beef to the site.)

According to Chicagoans, a true Italian beef relies on a consistent, harmonious formula of roast beef and hot giardiniera, all atop — this is important — a Turano Baking Company French roll. Roasted peppers, for a touch of sweetness, are optional. The sandwich is then “dipped, dunked or baptized” in beef juices according to jus preference, said Henry Tibensky, a native Chicagoan and the founder and chef of Hank’s Juicy Beef, a roving Chicago hot dog and sandwich pop-up in New York City.

Amjad Haj, an owner of two Al’s Beef locations in Chicago, hasn’t seen an increase in business, but his customers are talking about the show. “One thing I’ve heard a couple of times though is they don’t think the accent is right,” Mr. Haj said. (Staff members at three other Chicago-area restaurants we contacted hadn’t heard of “The Bear” at all.)

Not even the recent heat wave that hit much of the country could slow demand. Italian beef sandwich orders have doubled over the last two weeks at Emmett's, a Chicago-cuisine restaurant in Manhattan, said the owner, Emmett Burke.

At Mr. Beef On Orleans in Chicago, where exterior scenes for "The Bear" were shot, business is booming. Joseph Zuccherro, an owner who opened the shop in 1979, said he went from selling 250 to 300 Italian beefs per day pre-"Bear" to 800 daily in early July.

"The week after it aired, all of a sudden, we were out of bread," Mr. Zuccherro said. Some days he keeps the shop open three to four hours past closing time to accommodate the line of customers.

As for the show? "I haven't seen it yet," he said as a phone started to ring in the background. "I'm too busy. I'm waiting for all of the hullabaloo to calm down."