

Americans are grilling barbecue at home frequently than any time in the past 20 years, according to new research released Monday by the NPD Group, a leading authority on U.S. eating patterns. And the past 20 years were already the period of highest grill use in the United States.

The barbecue's increasing popularity appears to represent yet another potential threat to the restaurant industry, as consumers look to convenience foods such as prepared foods from supermarkets and delis, or indulge their desire to cook or eat at home.

Indeed, in a continuation of a trend, the number of meals purchased in restaurants is down 4 percent from 2000, the peak year for restaurant meal sales. In addition, more than 60 percent of those meals were eaten outside the restaurant.

The main driver for that is people wanting to eat at home when possible, according to Harry Balzer,

It's still a fact that 47.5 percent of all food dollars are spent at restaurants. However, restaurant meals cost three times as much as those prepared at home, and 75 percent of all meals are prepared and eaten at home, Balzer said.

The NPD survey tracked the habits of 3,500 Americans for a year.

According to NPD, 35 percent of American families fired up their gas and charcoal grills at least once every two weeks as they searched for easier methods to prepare the family meals.

"This is not so much about the flavor as it is the process," said Balzer. "This is all about making life easy."

Grilling is doing the same thing for getting meals onto the table quickly and easily that cars have done, he said.

See **GRILLING**, D3

THINGS TO DO

Love ribs? It's your lucky weekend

John Benson

The Chronicle-Telegram

So many ribs, so little time.

That's the mantra for this year's 15th annual Tops Great American Rib Cook-Off and Music Festival, which takes place Thursday to Monday at Tower City Amphitheater in Cleveland.

This year's event features 11 nationally-renowned ribbers, all seeking the coveted "Greatest Ribs in America," "Greatest Sauce in America" and "People's Choice" awards. Sure the prize money is nice, beginning with \$2,000 for first place, but it's the bragging rights that the cooks are really after.

While the novice consumer enjoys taste testing the diverse flavors, the actual judges are connoisseurs on all things ribs.

"It's a combination of things," said Northeast Ohio resident and longtime judge Jeff Chiplis. "It's the quality of the meat. You have your St. Louis versus your baby back. And then it's what they do to the meat before they put it on the smoker or the grill. Process is part of it too. And also, it's the sauce you're going to put on the last couple of minutes."

He added, "If the meat is falling

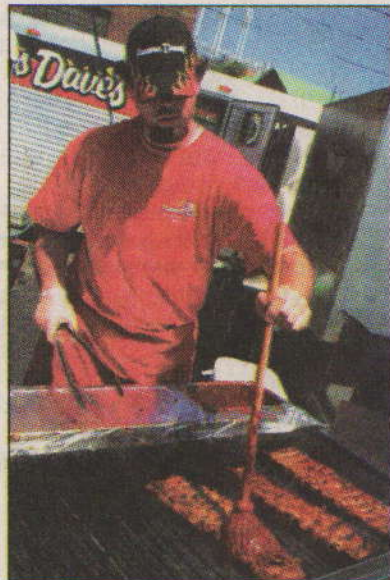


PHOTO PROVIDED

Famous Dave's grills up some ribs during last year's Tops Great American Rib Cook-Off.

off the bone, to me that's too done. That's overcooked. I like a little tug with it."

The Tremont resident and certified Kansas City Barbecue Society member said there are guidelines that judges follow. However, personal taste does play a role in

See **RIBS**, D3

Something good cooking in Berea

The 8th annual Berea National Rib Cook-Off at the Cuyahoga County Fairgrounds features a number of area and national rib vendors and master chefs who will tempt the palates of rib lovers.

Starting Friday and running through Memorial Day, the event typically welcomes thousands of people to celebrate the unofficial start of summer.

Friday's entertainment includes the 2nd annual Harley-Davidson Bike Night and musical acts including the Armstrong Bearcat Band (5 to 6:30 p.m.), Ted Riser & the Marshall Band (7 to 8:45 p.m.) and The ReBeats (9 to 11 p.m.).

Saturday features the crowning of the Miss Berea Princess and music by Woodshed Mercy (1 to 3 p.m.), Haywire (3:30 to 5:30 p.m.), Logan Wells (6 to 8 p.m.) and Robert Jeffrey Band (8:30 to 10:30 p.m.).

Sunday's lineup includes the all-day Classic Car Show; Clayton Brothers (1 to 3 p.m.), The Stokes Brothers (3:30 to 5:30 p.m.), Terry Lee Goffee's Johnny Cash Tribute (6 to 8 p.m.), and The Cleveland Boys (8:30 to 10:30 p.m.)

Alex Bevan's Band (5 to 7 p.m.) leads Monday's entertainment.

The Berea National Rib Cook-Off is sponsored by the Berea City Club, a nonprofit group that promotes civic projects. Proceeds benefit community programs in Berea.

IF YOU GO

WHAT: 15th Annual Tops Great American Rib Cook-Off and Music Festival.

WHEN: Thursday to Sunday

WHERE: Tower City Amphitheater, 351 Canal Road, Cleveland

TICKETS: \$6 (\$2 off using Tops Bonuscard). Kids under 12 free.

INFO: www.cleveland.com/rib

WHAT: 8th annual Berea's National Rib Cook-Off

WHEN: Friday to Monday

WHERE: Cuyahoga County Fairgrounds, located off Bagley Road just west of I-71.

TICKETS: Free Friday and Monday; \$5 Saturday and Sunday. Kids 12 and under free.

INFO: (440) 234-5181

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