

Stadiums



Stadium foodservice menus have become far more diverse than the traditional hotdogs, popcorn, nachos and soft drinks. Today's more discriminating fans can choose from a variety of dining options while cheering on their favorite team or performer.

By Lisa White,
Contributing Editor

“In the late '80s and early '90s, typical concession stands with basic offerings like hot dogs and pretzels made up about 80 percent to 90 percent of the menu, while the remaining outlets had a grill and fryer to prepare burgers, fries and basic deli sandwiches,” says Eric Wooden, vice president of facility design at Centerplate, a Stamford, Conn.-based hospitality company that provides foodservice for stadiums and other venues. “The offerings and guest expectations were very basic.”

Over the last decade, foodservice at these locations has turned into one of the most important aspects of the event. “Food is the way fans connect to the building, team or event, and brand,” Wooden says.

Stadium foodservice now encompasses not only concessions operations, but also full-service restaurants; club level options, which can include all-inclusive or pay-as-you-go buffets; catering; and in-seat service.

The foodservice contractor-run recreation segment, which includes stadium foodservice, is estimated to be a \$5.2 billion industry in terms of revenue, according to Technomic, a Chicago-based research firm. U.S. Census data indicates that food and alcohol revenue at self-operated spectator sports establishments totaled approximately \$930 million in 2007, the last year for which this information is available.

More concessions operations now accomplish about half the cooking at each location in the stadium. Previously, much of the cooking took place off site or in a production kitchen. As a result, combi ovens and induction cooking units in both carts and permanent stands are being utilized. Other trends in this segment include utilizing locally grown ingredients and an increase in ethnic food offerings.

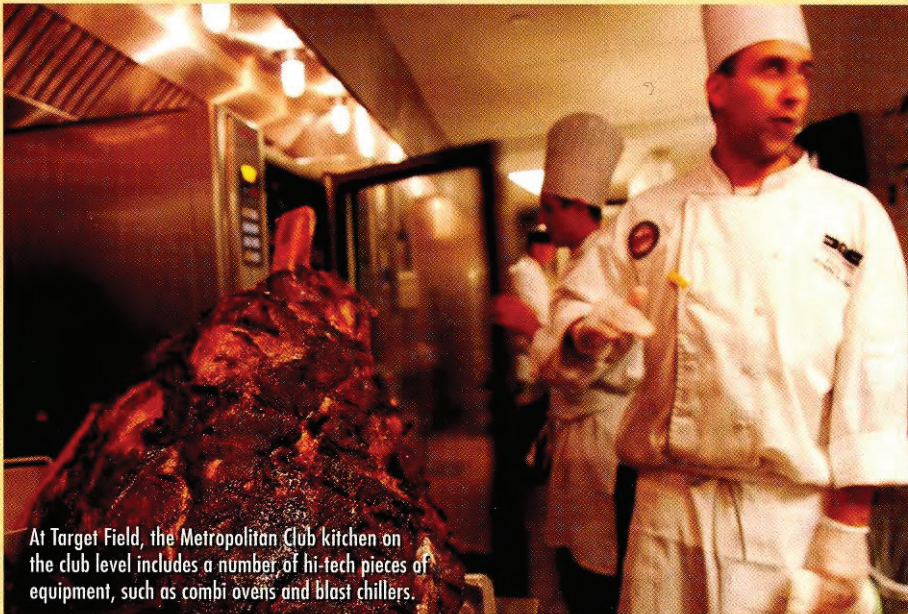
“Today, fans want to see where the product is coming from,” Wooden says. “Passing food through a window doesn't cut it anymore.”

Key Equipment for Stadium Concessions:

- Combi ovens
- Fryers
- Flat top griddles
- Induction burners
- Reach ins
- Roller grills
- Three compartment sinks
- Retractable heat lamps

Q&A

Pete Spike, general manager, Delaware North Sportservice, foodservice provider for Target Field, Minneapolis



At Target Field, the Metropolitan Club kitchen on the club level includes a number of hi-tech pieces of equipment, such as combi ovens and blast chillers.

When Minneapolis' Target Field opened last spring, it became known as more than just the home of the Minnesota Twins Major League Baseball team. The 40,000-seat venue's foodservice program showed just how far stadium fare has come over the years.

Target Field's foodservice is run by Delaware North Cos. Sportservice, a food, beverage and retail management firm that provides concessions, upscale catering and fine dining operations at professional sporting venues, entertainment complexes and convention centers across the United States and Canada.

In addition to traditional ballpark fare, which also has been taken up a notch, Delaware North partnered with some of Minneapolis' well-known food manufacturers and restaurants. The result is a concessions program that includes a bevy of signature offerings and local favorites. "In creating a diverse menu, we have done things differently," says Pete Spike, Sportservice's general manager. "We've expanded on ballpark food significantly."

Spike has been with Sportservice for 14 years, helping oversee foodservice programs at eight different venues during this time. He oversees Target Field's 29 fixed concession stands, 66 food and beverage carts, in-seat service, two themed restaurants open to all fans, several large clubs and suite foodservice.

The ballpark's eight concessions themes include Mill City Grille, which includes steak sandwiches and walleye fish fingers; Hennepin Grille, which offers burgers, hot dogs, fries and chicken tenders; Frankie V's Italian, providing a variety of pizza, calzones and Italian chopped salad; North Shore Creamery, serving soft-serve ice cream; Halsey's Sausage Haus, which offers chili, wild rice soup, sausage and hot dogs; Senor Smoke's, providing empanadas, nachos, burritos and tacos; Taste of Twins Territory, which offers brats, hot dogs and pretzels; State Fair Classics, offering fair favorites like kabobs and cheese curds; and Twins Brews, which provides craft and premium beers.

FE&S spoke with Spike to discuss the development of Target Field's concession operations, the unique aspects of

the ballpark's offerings and how its equipment supports speed of service.

FE&S: What is unique about Target Field's stadium concessions operations?

PS: We are recognized for our different style of service. We focus a lot on preparing fresh items. People at Target Field can watch their product being prepared, and this provides visuals in back of the concessions stands. Nothing here is pre-wrapped. We assemble to order. Our three main kitchens create most of the food. In planning our kitchens and foodservice facilities, the Twins worked with consultant John DePaola, managing principal for Foodservice Resources out of Fredericksburg, Va.

FE&S: Please describe your signature menu items.

PS: When we opened with preseason games last spring, we needed to react to popular demand. After tapping into local and regional markets to see what food and brands people enjoyed, we decided to partner with local restaurants and suppliers so we could incorporate these items into our operation. We partnered with Minneapolis' Kramarczuk Sausage Co., a 55-year-old, family-owned manufacturer of bratwurst, Polish and Hungarian sausage. We initially prepared the sausage on 3-ft. flat top grills at two portable carts but, due to the popularity, we added this product to two more cart locations. We sold more than 80,000 lbs. of sausage this past season.

We also partnered with The Loon Café and J.D. Hoyt's, Minneapolis restaurants, to serve Hoyt's grilled Cajun pork chop and the Loon's Pecos River Red chili.

Our most surprising partnership was with Murray's Steakhouse, another well-known city restaurant. We collaborated to develop a signature steak sandwich for our Mill City Grill concessions locations and it was so popular they ended up putting it on their restaurant's menu. We averaged about 1,100 of these sandwiches per game in seven concessions locations, which is phenomenal. This was a tribute to how we were set up for success with our equipment.

We also worked with local supermarket chains Lund's and Byerly's to provide their wild rice soup during the colder months. The soup was being offered at three Halsey's Sausage Haus concession stands, and we expanded its sales to hawkers for seat service due to its popularity.

What makes the stadium foodservice segment unique is the daily volume and scale. "Feeding as many as 80,000 people at a single event or game means speed of service, managing throughput and keeping fresh product in-house are key," Wooden says.

Stadium foodservice continues to reflect current cuisine trends and even sets some in the industry. "The stadium staples will always have a place, but these venues need to offer the selection people have come to expect," Wooden says.

CASE STUDY: Papa John's Stadium, Louisville, Ky.

Before Louisville's Papa John's Cardinal Stadium underwent a \$71 million expansion, there was little cooking going on in the concession stands or hospitality suites. As a result, foodservice offerings were limited to items that

could be easily warmed up or held, such as hot dogs, nachos and popcorn.

After the renovation was completed last September, the home of the University of Louisville football team became much more hospitable to fans in terms of its food availability and offerings. The 12-year-old stadium's expansion added 13,000 seats, including 33 new suites on the east side of the stadium and a terrace for standing room, connecting the east and west sides. With the upgrades, the venue can now accommodate more than 55,000 people.

The suites and loge seats open into the 20,000-sq.-ft. PNC Club, extending from end zone to end zone. The area features lounge seating, a full-service bar and concessions. The new terrace can hold 2,500 fans and concessions tents on game day, and is also available for special events.

"The goal was to provide cooking in all of the stadium's new concessions stands," says Eric Wooden, vice president of facility design at Centerplate, a Stamford, Conn.-based hospitality company that



Far Left: Target Field partners with Minneapolis' Kramarczuk Sausage Co., a 55-year-old, family-owned manufacturer of bratwurst, Polish and Hungarian sausage. Initially, sausage was prepared on 3-ft. flat top grills at two portable carts but, due to the popularity, two more cart locations were added. In 2010, Target Field sold more than 80,000 lbs. of sausage.

Stadium menus have become more diverse and a big part of that is ethnic fare. Here, chefs prepare Asian menu items at Target Field in Minneapolis.

Another partnership was with Vincent — A Restaurant, an acclaimed French eatery in the city. Its Vincent Burger, which is made with Angus beef stuffed with braised short rib and smoked Gouda cheese, is sold at six Hennepin Grille concession stands.

Four different hot dogs are provided by Minneapolis' Schweigert Meats. These include the Original Twins Dog, made from the same recipe as the Twins' first hot dog; the quarter-pound beef Twins Big Dog; the old-fashioned Dugout Dog; and the extra-long Dinger Dog.

FE&S: How does the foodservice equipment support the production?

PS: A lot of menu items need to be prepped in advance. We have three large production kitchens dedicated to our suites and the Champions and Metropolitan Clubs. Sandwiches are prepped in these kitchens, as well. This allows us to deliver fresh food and increase our sales.

The 2,700-sq.-ft. Champion's Club kitchen is located on the service level and includes a rotisserie grill that's visible from the dining room. The Metropolitan Club kitchen on the club level is 2,800 sq. ft. and includes a number of combi ovens and blast chillers.

Target Field's 3,200-sq.-ft. suites kitchen is centrally located by the stadium's 54 suites and also includes combi ovens and blast chillers.

Most of our nine themed stands contain combi ovens. Grill stands have flat top griddles, char grills, fryers and steam wells to dispense hot food. Our Taste of Twins stands, which offer traditional ballpark food, have roller grills for tube meats, popcorn poppers and pretzel warmers. Each suite has three induction warmers for use on the buffet lines, eliminating the need for sterno and chafing dishes. This has saved labor, since it provides consistent heat that doesn't burn out.

FE&S: What technology is invaluable for stadium foodservice?

PS: We have combi ovens in more than 80 percent of our concession stands, and these units have changed our menu for the better. We can now keep up with fresh assembly. We no longer have to wait for roller grills to cook hot dogs. These ovens allow us to cook food faster, whether we're steaming or using convection heat. They are a nice addition that has allowed us to cook in advance, but still assemble and hold product on site.

FE&S: What attributes do you look for when purchasing equipment?

PS: Equipment is an investment, and you get what you pay for. With this ballpark startup, there were three areas that were most important

provides foodservice for stadiums and other venues.

In addition to a full-service production kitchen, the renovation added two stands on the club level and six on the upper concourse. "All are vented and have cooking capability. There is very little holding capacity for hot foods, since we want to serve right off the grill as much as possible," Wooden says.

Speed of service in a stadium setting is highly dependent on good design and the right equipment. Rather than placing the grill, hood and fryers on the back walls, the venue's new concession stands have cooking lines running perpendicular to the service counter. The new open design has grills and fryers arranged back-to-back, so customers can easily view the production line and food preparation.

to us. Working with quality partners that have great reputations and stand behind their products was key. Also, because Target Field is a LEED-certified building, all equipment that could be is Energy Star rated. In addition, warranties were a factor in purchasing equipment. By the same token, we realize we need to do our part to maintain the life of the equipment. We have a strong preventative maintenance program in place to make sure equipment is cleaned and shut down properly.

FE&S: What plans do you have for the coming year for your foodservice program?

PS: We really haven't dialed into anything new yet. We're hoping to expand our menu, but it is so expansive now that it will be a matter of deciding what to add and what to remove. We always look for the next best thing. There also are plans to expand our in-seat program, since people want quick service for specialty items. We will consider creating new items and expanding ballpark fare or adding amenities to concepts. We also will continue shaping our portable program so we can create

more storage and support for these outlets to be more self-sufficient.

FE&S: What do you predict for the stadium foodservice segment in the future?

PS: Because each stadium location is different, it's not possible to impose one thing across all boundaries and be successful. In major league baseball, there are franchises that do very well and others that need to reinvent themselves to attract and retain fans. Some clubs that are struggling are going to inclusive sections in which fans pay one price for a ticket that includes unlimited food and beverages to provide more value for fans. Fortunately, we've had a strong year and anticipate another one, so we don't need to take this route.

We plan on continuing to incorporate partnerships into our operation for 2011, maintaining our momentum. We are looking at the regional market to see if there are other iconic offerings we can include in the menu. Today, it's as much about the food as the overall experience. We want to help make Target Field the place to be.

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E&S Considerations

- **Transportability:** Equipment used in concessions operations is typically moved around often to different stands and/or areas throughout the season. Casters and quick disconnect options help facilitate relocation.
- **Reliability and Durability:** Stadium foodservice operations are geared for high volume in short periods of time. Durable units that provide quick recovery times are needed to stand up to the heavy usage.
- **Flexibility:** Stadium menus change, depending on the event and its attendees. Equipment should accommodate a variety of production needs and food types.



At Louisville's Papa John's Stadium, the concession stands' open design allows customers to view the production line and food preparation.

"When producing a lot of food in a short amount of time, it can be difficult to meet the demand, but we're doing it," Wooden says. "Our equipment needs fast recovery, since throughput and speed of service demand it."

Preparing food to order has saved on spoilage, helping Centerplate manage its expenditures and allowing the company to keep better track of the items that are selling. "The biggest challenge in stadium foodservice is sheer scale and the number of menu offerings," Wooden says.

Unlike restaurants' more static menus, food offerings change at venues that host a variety of events. Concerts require a larger volume of beverages. A show geared at children necessitates more kid-friendly selections. Premium performances may involve upscale fare.

For this reason, foodservice equipment also needs to be flexible to accommodate menu changes for different events. "Standard staples, such as hotdogs, account for most of what we sell," Wooden says.

Yet, the menu was expanded after the renovation to include specialty items, including Skinny Skins, a nacho-type snack built around potato chips, and Beef Burgoo, a dish that includes beef and French fries. "We're also offering Asian concepts, where we cook noodles on a flat top grill in front of guests and serve it in a traditional cardboard Chinese food container," Wooden says.

In addition to a layout that enhances speed of service, Papa John's Cardinal Stadium's new concessions areas also have been designed to be as self-contained as possible. Main equipment includes grills, fryers, roller grills, refrigeration, retractable heat lamps and a few newer items. "The combi

oven and induction burners are two newer pieces of concessions equipment that we haven't utilized as much in the past," Wooden says.

Centerplate has moved away from utilizing drawer warmers and, instead, has incorporated heated shelves with retractable heat lamps for temperature control. These systems heat the food on the top and bottom for a few seconds before it's delivered to customers. The units also work as built-in displays to help promote various items.

"When I specify equipment, it's important that the manufacturer stand behind their product and deliver it in a timely manner," Wooden says. "Also, durability is always essential. We have a rough business that's hard on equipment."

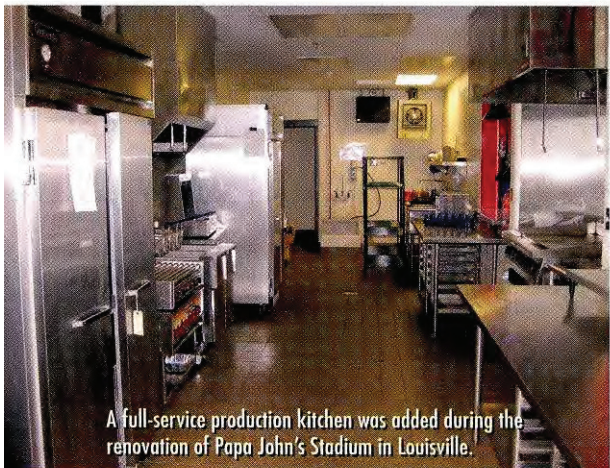
Unlike a restaurant, where equipment is stagnant, concessions areas regularly move units back and forth to other parts of the building. Quick disconnect components and casters are commonplace. "A slicer may move around 200 times during a football season, so easy transport is necessary," Wooden says. "Everything we buy is on wheels. If a unit doesn't have them already, we'll put them on ourselves."

The new production kitchen includes UDS (Utility Distribution System) walls so equipment can be easily changed out and quickly moved for cleaning.

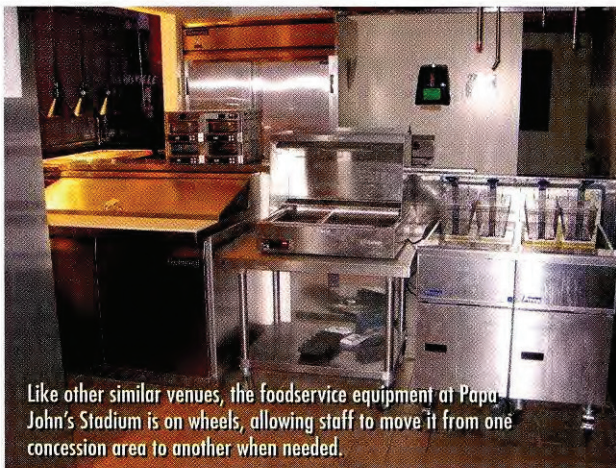
Equipment technology and innovation have helped transform stadium concessions operations. "Combi ovens provide menu consistency, no matter who's in the kitchen. Line cooks can assemble recipes and program 200 menu items to cook in these units. Fryers can go continuously now, providing consistent results with no down time," Wooden says. "Mobile hot boxes' plastic exterior makes these units lighter and easier to move as well as resistant to scratches and dents."

Even with all of the changes in Papa John's Cardinal Stadium's concessions program, Centerplate continues to look for ways to up the ante.

"We are always looking for new and exciting ideas to incorporate into our programs," Wooden says. **FE&S**



A full-service production kitchen was added during the renovation of Papa John's Stadium in Louisville.



Like other similar venues, the foodservice equipment at Papa John's Stadium is on wheels, allowing staff to move it from one concession area to another when needed.