

NEW YORK POST

Burger madness takes over NY

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- Last Updated: 11:07 AM, January 21, 2013
- Posted: 11:17 PM, January 18, 2013

New Yorkers must smell like fresh meat.

The burger craze sweeping the country has sparked fierce competition in the New York metro area, where a growing pack of chains is looking to cater to the beef-obsessed.

Among those cashing in on the city's burger boom is Five Guys, which has opened 23 restaurants in the five boroughs since it entered the market in 2007.

It has plans to open another 20 stores in Manhattan alone, including three this year, according to spokeswoman Molly Catalano. The Lorton, Va., chain also has 10 locations on Long Island.



Meat matters: New York City is in the midst of a burger boom, with a bevy of chains rolling out ambitious expansion plans.

Checkers Drive-In has seen so much demand in the New York market that more than half of its new contracts signed last year are for stores here, Jennifer Durham, vice-president of Checkers' franchise development, told The Post.

The Tampa, Fla., company signed contracts last year for 45 new restaurants across the country, 23 of which are slated for Long Island and the five boroughs, Durham said.

Fourteen are scheduled to be rolled out this year, including six in Brooklyn and one in Manhattan. If the demand by franchisees for New York locations continues this year, Checkers' presence in New York could even "triple or quadruple," Durham said.

Chains with an appetite for growth are eager to expand here despite concerns about a burger bubble, especially in the high-end market where the classic bun-and-patty combo can cost north of \$10.

Los Angeles favorite Fatburger, which peddles gourmet burgers, is planning to open its first New York location in April in Manhattan's Murray Hill neighborhood, with a goal to follow up with 10 more New York stores.

The 60-year-old chain has cultivated a posh image by sponsoring film mogul Harvey Weinstein's Golden Globes after-party at the Beverly Hilton, which led to the rare sighting of stars, including "Project Runway" host Heidi Klum, Leonardo DiCaprio and Robert Pattinson, chowing down on fries and beef.

Other fresh-faced entrants looking to squeeze into the crowded New York market include Denver, Colo.-based Smashburger and Jake's Wayback Burger, based in Newark, Del.

Jake's landed in 2011 with two Brooklyn stores and three on Long Island. The chain is planning six more venues on LI over the next few years, said Marketing Director Gillian Maffeo.

Shake Shack, which got its start as a hot dog cart in Manhattan's Madison Square Park, may be the only chain not looking to expand here. It has seven locations in hot spots like Times Square and Citi Field but plans to grow in other markets.

"New York is where we have the most number of locations. It's our home base," said spokesman Edwin Bragg.

The burger craze is not limited to New York. Consumption is on the rise nationally, with close to half of consumers, or 48 percent, eating a burger at least once a week, up from 38 percent in 2009, according to industry tracker Technomic.

"This is America," said Jake Wayback's Maffeo. "As much as people say they don't like fast food, everybody does."

With reporting by Ian Mohr