

## If Pigs Had Wings – Marketing for the Big Game

You've heard the old expression, "if pigs had wings"? It is said to have originated in Scotland, but the sentiment is one found in many cultures. Quite simply, it's a sarcastic way to describe something that could never happen – or could it? Another thing that you are probably familiar with also got its start in Scotland – fried chicken. When everyone else was boiling their birds, the Scots liked to bread and deep-fry them in pig lard, and they brought this tradition to the U.S. in the 18th century.

Until the 1950's, fried chicken was typically only eaten at special occasions, like Sunday dinner. But in the 1950's two things happened that would ever change how Americans view chicken – the television (TV) set and Colonel Sanders. In the 1950's, the U.S. saw a tenfold increase in the number of TV sets in American homes. The decade also saw the invention of the TV tray that allowed viewers to eat in front of their sets. Concurrently, a Southern entrepreneur, Harlan Sanders, came up with a way to mass produce fried chicken – making it a legitimate fast food. By the 1960's TV and fried chicken were American staples.

Then, on a Sunday afternoon in January 1967, the Green Bay Packers faced off against the Kansas City Chiefs in the very first Super Bowl. Few of the estimated 27 million Americans gathered around their TV sets on that day realized the profound impact football would have on snack food consumption. On that day, chicken, TV, and football became inextricably linked. That was five decades ago and, today, chicken, especially wings, the perfect finger food, have become the perennial favorite of football fans.

But this popularity came at a price, or a higher price to be precise. You see, the increased demand for chicken wings sometimes exceeded availability, leading to higher cost to consumers. Rather than forgo their favorite finger food, fans looked for more available and less costly alternatives. Enter the pork rib, also a perfect finger food, inexpensive, widely available, and very popular in many parts of the country.

Like the chicken wing, the pork rib was once considered a low value item, and when eaten, they were typically boiled. That changed in early 20th century with the increased popularity of slow-cooked barbecuing. With leg and shoulder cuts most in demand, low-cost pork ribs were widely available and, by the 1920's, barbecued pork ribs were being eaten across the nation. In the late 1940's, the "St. Louis" style of cutting ribs was developed where the rib was squared by removing the lower cartilage and fat, aka the rib tip or riblet. The riblet, once a throwaway cut, became widely popular and is sometimes referred to as the new chicken wing.

While the popularity of chicken wings for sports gatherings exploded in the 1960's, supported by the creation of the buffalo wing, the popularity for pork ribs has been much slower to develop. However, it is safe to say that today, pork ribs rival chicken wings as fan favorites in many parts of the country and in a range of forms to meet a variety of consumer tastes. Fans can choose from various fresh rib forms suitable for in-home preparation using the family recipe or, for the less ambitious fan, pre-cooked and flavored in sealed pouches or, for the ultimate couch potato, pre-cooked to order from the local take-out restaurant or grocery deli.

But pork ribs cannot rest as, in recent years, they are seeing a growing challenge from pulled pork and sausage. A growing trend for the big game is the increased popularity of boneless, barbecue-flavored pulled and shredded pork, perfect on a bun and easily held in one hand leaving the other hand free for a "beverage".

Another rival, pork dinner sausages and bratwurst, typically summer grilling favorites, get their first big marketing boost of the year during the Super Bowl and are enjoying increasing popularity among football fans.

So do pigs have wings? Well maybe not the kind that would allow them to fly but certainly, if like chicken wings, pork ribs are a perfect fan favorite finger food, then in a way, pigs really do have wings.

Chicken Wing Portions per Super Bowl TV Viewer

