



Do Chefs *Still* Prefer Natural Gas?

by Tom Stroozas – CFE, RCGC, CFSP
GFEN Consulting Editor

Is natural gas still “America’s FAVORITE Cook”? Well, if you peek into the kitchens of most restaurants, you will still see the majority of chefs busy producing their cuisine over a gas flame. The reason is simple: gas range burners respond instantly, produce a visible flame, and deliver precise heat at the turn of a dial.

Jeff LaBarge, Culinary Arts Program Director at Central Piedmont Community College in Charlotte, NC says, “I’ve been in this business for over 25 years and I don’t know of any professional chefs that prefer using electric. We have taught more than 5,000 students to use gas ranges because they are easier to control, quicker to heat up, simpler to clean, and less expensive to maintain. When deciding between gas and electric cooking appliances, there really is no question. Gas is always the better alternative.”

Simple Benefits

There have been many surveys taken over the years and each has favored gas as the top choice of professional chefs. When asked why they favor gas over electric, the same answers were heard repeatedly:

- Greater control over temperature
- Faster cook times
- Immediate and visual heat (range top burner)
- It costs less to operate

The popularity of network and local television cooking shows has also been a factor by subliminally promoting gas for cooking on the home front. After all, if celebrity “Chef Vinney” produces all that fine cuisine on his television program with gas equipment, then shouldn’t you be cooking with gas too?

Proof Is In The Pudding

The versatility of the primary “workhorse” found in most foodservice kitchens, the common gas range,



“Gas is always the better alternative,” says Jeff LaBarge, Culinary Arts Program Director, Central Piedmont Community College, Charlotte, NC

has stood the test of time and continues to receive praise from professional culinarians. National and regional accounts, ranging from hotels to casual and fine dining establishments, continue to tout reasons why natural gas is still their favorite way to cook. Excerpts from a survey conducted in August 2009 by an independent consulting group, produced commentary such as the following:

“I prefer gas because of the visual heat monitoring, quick response and overall higher BTU’s generated than typical electric equipment. And I really like using today’s modern and highly versatile gas combi-oven,” said Jeff Bacon CEC, CCA, AAC Director/Executive Chef Triad Community Kitchen and Second Harvest Food Bank of NUNC. (See sidebars for comments from other professional chefs who participated in the survey.)

But What About Induction?

One of the latest cooking technologies that has been trying to gain acceptance of professional culinarians is induction. These units claim greater efficiency, a cooler kitchen and improved safety. While induction may win the battle of efficiency,



“In my hotel kitchens, we prefer to use gas because it’s faster and gets to higher temperatures quicker than comparable electric equipment. And, it cools down faster too! Our batteries of six-burner ranges provide us with infinite versatility to grill, boil, sear and sauté.”

— Jean-Pierre Marechal, Executive Chef
Marriott Center City, Charlotte, NC

other issues have hindered it from being fully embraced; for example, it requires the use of ferrous-type cookware which can add an additional expense. Many chefs who have converted to using induction find out, after the fact, that not all stainless steel cookware works equally well on induction units. Much depends on how the manufacturer has assembled the layers of metal from which the pot or pan is made. Do not assume that all cookware labeled “stainless steel” will work on an induction unit, because it won’t.

Another unanticipated added expense can occur if you have to increase the electrical supply to accommodate the high-amperage requirements of high-production electric induction equipment.

Some drawbacks are not monetary but rather involve the cooking process. A professional chef and acquaintance, who wishes to remain anonymous, mentioned that a recent expansion to his country club facility incorporated some induction cooktops. His adoption of this “new” technology has not gone well.

“I miss the heavy grates on gas stoves because pots stay firmly in place, whereas they tend to slide around on the smooth glass induction surface. I also miss the fact that gas heats the sides of your sauté pans — induction does not do this because there is no residual heat rising up the sides. I also miss the sounds associated with gas cooking, and you’ll never be able

to flambé on induction without a match or lighter.”

When asked how induction affects his cooking process he said, “I used to quickly heat tortillas and flat breads directly on my gas burners. I can’t do that with induction.” So, while induction may be an up and coming technology, it is not likely to change the tried and true methods most chefs still prefer — to create and cook their products with natural gas.

Equipment Evolutions & Improvements

Just because gas cooking has a great following however, doesn’t mean that things aren’t evolving to the next level. There have been countless improvements regarding operational features and increased efficiencies that continue to keep gas equipment as “America’s FAVORITE Cook”. Each year since 2000, the Gas Foodservice Equipment Network (GFEN) salutes its “Blue Flame Product of the Year Award” winner. This prestigious industry award is presented to a gas equipment manufacturer who exhibits exemplary improvements and technology innovations for various types of foodservice equipment. A few of the recent winners include:

- Middleby-Marshall’s WOW! Gas Conveyor Oven was named GFEN’s 2009 Product of the Year. The WOW! is the fastest cooking and most energy

“When training newcomers to our industry, it’s important that a consistent product is achieved. My experience is that gas offers more of an ability to quickly control cooking temps. My appliance favorite is a big tilt skillet. Stews to mass quantities of fried eggs can be done on this versatile workhorse.”

— Ron Ahlert, Executive Director
Community Culinary School of Charlotte



“I prefer gas for most cooking applications in our corporate demo kitchens due to speed, fast recovery and operational economics. We get big benefits from our gas tilting skillets too because with a little creativity you can sauté, stir fry, panfry, deep-fry, braise, poach, boil, steam, roast and you can even bake a cake in it.”

— Chris Donato, CEC
Corporate Chef, Nestle Professional Foodservice



efficient gas conveyor oven in the industry. Its patented “energy eye” technology senses when product is on the belt; if no product is present, the energy eye puts the oven into “sleep mode” thereby reducing energy usage by 30% over standard efficiency units.

- Frymaster’s Protector Gas Fryer features a 30-pound fry pot that uses 40% less oil than a fry pot twice its size yet delivers the same amount of food as a 50 pound fryer. Its Smart4U Oil Attendant technology automatically replenishes oil as needed making for better hedonics and production. With its high-efficiency infrared burner, it has earned an energy efficiency rating of 56.4%

- The Market Forge Gas Eco-Tech Plus Pressureless Steamer uses 80 percent less water and 30 percent less energy. The 10-pan steamer boasts the first built-in water filter system, the first built-in water management system, and a unique “steam on demand” concept with a “steam and hold” feature. This high-efficiency system consumes a minimal amount of water while generating steam with greater efficiency.

Time to Make the Switch?

If your foodservice facility is equipped with an array of electric equipment, you have no doubt experienced the following situations:

- Patiently watching the stovetop as minutes pass by while waiting for a pot of water to heat up and boil.
- Discovering that your “medium heat” has burned your over-medium fried egg and now it’s sticking to your favorite skillet.
- An expertly prepared soufflé comes out less than perfect in execution because of uneven cooking by an electric oven.

The bottom line is this...electric cooking equipment has generally been more costly to operate and less likely to produce the consistent results you can achieve with a piece of gas equipment. Isn’t it time to make the switch to natural gas? Contact your local gas utility to learn first hand why gas is still “America’s FAVORITE Cook”!

For more information on how natural gas can help improve your bottom line and the environment, log onto the Gas Foodservice Equipment Network website at www.gfen.com



“As a professional chef and culinary instructor, I prefer the more precise controllable attributes of gas. Gas heats pots and pans quickly, and during the cooking process, the flame can be controlled up or down depending on how much heat you need. And, if you’re looking for a grilled and smoky flavor (wok hay) in a dish when stir frying, the intense gas heat is nearly impossible to achieve with electric or induction. A simple sauté pan, and a gas burner — you can do so many things — it is up to your imagination.”

— Joe Bonaparte, CEC, CC, MHM
Director of Curriculum & Quality Assurance
The International Culinary Schools at the Art Institute