

NEWS RELEASE

South Korean Restaurant Locations in the U.S. Grow 10% Over the Past Year Amid Surge in Demand for Korean Cuisine

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Chicago, Sept. 11, 2024 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) -- **Circana™**, a leading advisor on the complexity of consumer behavior, today released new research highlighting South Korea's rising influence on the U.S. foodservice industry. Korean restaurants, foods, beverages, and flavors are experiencing rapid growth, with the number of Korean restaurant locations increasing by 10% in the past year alone. The surge has been fueled by expansion across both full-service restaurant (FSR) and quick-service restaurant (QSR) segments.

Since 2018, 450 new Korean restaurant locations have opened in the U.S., with 36% concentrated in key markets like Los Angeles, San Francisco, and New York City. One-third of designated market areas (DMAs) still lack any Korean restaurants, marking an area ripe for opportunity in the Asian restaurant subcategory.

"As Western QSRs continue to innovate with limited-time offers, introducing Korean flavors presents a unique opportunity to tap into the growing U.S. demand for global tastes," said Tim Fires, president, Global Foodservice, Circana. "This culinary trend is a vital part of the Korean Wave—a cultural movement that has elevated South Korean pop culture, from K-pop to K-dramas, to worldwide prominence since the 1990s, now further amplified by the reach of platforms like TikTok."

Korean food and beverage influences gaining popularity include:

- Korean Fried Chicken: Seven Korean fried chicken chains in the U.S. total 405 locations, with a 22% growth compared to last year and doubling in number since 2019. Several well-known fast-food chains also offer popular Korean chicken flavors.

- Korean Corn Dogs: Five chains specializing in Korean corn dogs have a total of 242 locations in the U.S., a 52% increase from last year. These chains did not exist six years ago.
- Korean Ramen: Ramen exploded in popularity in 2023 after gaining popularity on TikTok, with one leading brand rising from less than 1% of retail ramen sales in 2022 to over 4% in 2024.
- Kimchi: This traditional Korean side dish, made from salted and fermented vegetables like napa cabbage or Korean radish, has seen an 80% increase in cases in the U.S. compared to last year, making it the top-growing vegetable with over 10,000 cases.
- Korean Sauces: Korean flavors are increasingly present on foodservice menus, with notable growth in Korean BBQ Jerky Sauce (+80%), Spicy Korean Sauce (+29%), and Korean Hot Sauce (+23%) over the past year.
- Dalgona Coffee: Originating in Macau but popularized in Korea during the pandemic, this whipped coffee was named "dalgona" by actor Jung Il-woo on a Korean TV show.
- Bubble Tea: Originally from Taiwan, bubble tea has become popular in Korea and is growing rapidly in the U.S., with several chains offering bubble tea alongside their corn dog menu items. Bubble tea has seen a 32% growth in locations and a 387% increase in cases compared to the previous year.

As the U.S. continues to diversify, Circana anticipates a growing presence of global cuisines, including Korean, as well as diverse flavors and culinary trends in the U.S. foodservice sector.

About Circana

Circana is a leading advisor on the complexity of consumer behavior. Through superior technology, advanced analytics, cross-industry data, and deep expertise, we provide clarity that helps almost 7,000 of the world's leading brands and retailers take action and unlock business growth. We understand more about the complete consumer, the complete store, and the complete wallet so our clients can go beyond the data to apply insights, ignite innovation, meet consumer demand, and outpace the competition. Learn more at circana.com.

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