



**SOUTH CHICAGO  
PACKING**

*the*  
**TALLOW SHIFT**

# **THE FRYER** *Factor*

**How Oil Choice is Reshaping  
Restaurant Performance**



# THE INGREDIENT NO ONE TALKED ABOUT, *Until Now*

For decades, frying oil was the ingredient nobody questioned. It filled the fryer, it got the job done and it stayed invisible on the menu, in the conversation and in the budget review. Operators chose it by habit, by vendor relationship or by price per pound.

**Nobody called a team meeting about frying oil. That's changing.**

Today, frying oil is becoming a strategic decision point. It touches flavor, perception, guest loyalty, operational efficiency and brand positioning all at once. The operators paying attention are recognizing something the rest of the industry is just beginning to understand: when guests are scrutinizing value more carefully than ever, every detail matters. Including what's in the fryer.

**+350%**

**Growth in tallow menu mentions  
in the last 4 years**

Source: Datassential, March 2026

Beef tallow is emerging at the center of that conversation. According to Datassential, menu mentions of tallow have risen over 350% from 2022 to 2026, and this doesn't look like a short-term trend. It's proving to be a performance-driven answer to pressures operators are already feeling.



# CONSUMER CURIOSITY AROUND TALLOW IS GROWING

The shift toward tallow has a lot to do with consumer tastes, and the data is making that increasingly clear.

**56%**

**Consumer awareness  
of beef tallow**

Source: Beef Tallow: Food Profile, Datassential, March 2026

**59%**

**Love it or like it  
after trying**

Source: Beef Tallow: Food Profile, Datassential, March 2026

**+98%**

**Predicted menu mention  
growth over the next 4 years**

Source: Beef Tallow: Food Profile, Datassential, March 2026

According to Datassential, 56% of consumers are now aware of beef tallow as a cooking ingredient. 24% have already tried it, and among those who have, 59% say they love or like it. That's not a fringe audience. That's a category in the early stages of mainstream adoption.

The loyalty numbers are equally compelling. Tallow dishes are earning a loyalty score of 82.0 (1.4 points higher than the chain average) and driving 7.4% higher visit satisfaction compared to similar dishes. Tallow menu mentions already rose more than 40% from late 2023 to late 2024, and Technomic projects that growth continuing at +54% over the next two years, making tallow one of the fastest-growing ingredient callouts in foodservice.

**This is a consumer behavior shift and a culinary moment. The operators who recognize this will be positioned ahead of the curve.**

## A FEW CONVERGING FORCES ARE DRIVING THIS:

### FLAVOR CURIOSITY

Guests are increasingly interested in rich, indulgent flavor experiences and tallow delivers that in a way seed oil simply can't replicate. The sensory difference is noticeable and guests are gravitating toward it.

### THE SATISFACTION CONNECTION

When flavor improves, perception follows. Guests who order dishes cooked with tallow report stronger loyalty and higher satisfaction. And they do this without knowing it's tallow first. They like it because the food performed differently.

### INGREDIENT AWARENESS

Social media has accelerated consumer interest in what their food is actually cooked in. Search interest in beef tallow is peaking. Technomic's Buzz Barometer places it firmly in "hot" territory with that curiosity translating into dining decisions.

# THE ECONOMICS OF THE FRYER

The headwinds operators are navigating in 2026 are well-documented:

- ✓ **Menu prices** have reached a ceiling in many markets. Guests are more deliberate about where they spend.
- ✓ **Labor availability** remains constrained, and BOH wage growth since 2020 has significantly increased the cost of kitchen time.
- ✓ **Food costs** continue to be volatile, making per-unit economics harder to predict.
- ✓ **Insurance, delivery fees and overhead** are compressing margins from multiple directions.

The result is a dining environment where guests are asking, consciously or not, "Is this worth it?" every time they make a dining decision. And operators are under pressure to answer that question convincingly at every price point. Frying oil intersects with both of those imperatives.

## Tighter Margins. Smarter Inputs.

Consumer interest alone wouldn't be enough to move operators. But tallow's rise is happening simultaneously with a set of operational pressures that are forcing kitchens to evaluate every input more carefully, including oil.

“For independents, survival depends on being unmistakably distinctive while maintaining operational discipline. For larger brands, success depends on simplifying complexity and scaling productivity.”

*Texas Restaurant Association*

## Performance Attributes. Operational Outcomes.

The performance case for tallow isn't abstract. It translates directly to operational outcomes that operators are already trying to achieve. Tallow's naturally saturated and stable fat structure gives it properties that seed oils simply don't have:

### HIGH SMOKE POINT (~400°F)

Tallow maintains performance at high heat without the rapid degradation that accelerates breakdown in less stable oils.

### EXTENDED FRY LIFE

Tallow outperforms seed oils by up to 6 additional days in the fryer. Meaning fewer oil changes, less product cost, reduced labor and lower disposal frequency. Operators who switch consistently report nearly doubling their fry life.

### FLAVOR CONSISTENCY

Stable oil means consistent food. Every basket performs the same from morning to afternoon to Friday night rush, because the fat isn't degrading the way seed oil does across service.

### LESS OFF-FLAVOR TRANSFER

As seed oil breaks down, it introduces bitterness that affects everything cooked in it. Tallow's stability means less flavor contamination across dayparts and fewer rejected batches.

### CROSS-UTILIZATION

Tallow isn't limited to the fryer. It performs across frying, roasting, sautéing and baking applications, giving kitchens more flexibility from a single ingredient.

Source: SCP Fry Life Study, Conducted by Colorado State University Animal Sciences Dept.



PRICE PER POUND  
≠ COST PER USE

## When fry life doubles, the math changes.

The operational math is straightforward: longer fry life reduces oil change frequency, which reduces labor hours, disposal costs and filter maintenance. When you evaluate tallow on cost-per-use rather than cost-per-pound, the comparison looks very different.

# OIL AS A *Competitive* DIFFERENTIATOR

## When Your Oil Becomes Your Story

A significant signal that oil choice has crossed from operational decision to brand decision is that it's being mentioned on more menus.

In recent months, tallow callouts have appeared prominently across a range of operators:

- ✓ **Mastro's Restaurants** listing Rosemary Garlic Wild Mushrooms with the note: "Proudly frying with Wagyu Beef Tallow."
- ✓ **The Jack Dusty at the Ritz-Carlton Sarasota** featuring beef tallow butter prominently in their ribeye description.
- ✓ **Space Aliens Grill & Bar** calling out their fries as "Cooked in 100% Beef Tallow – the best fries in the entire universe."
- ✓ **Loom** featuring Tallow Potato Wedges as a named menu component on their roast chicken.

Tallow is a featured callout that signals quality and intention to the guest before they take a bite.

**The message these operators are sending is clear: if you're highlighting your oil choice on the menu, it's no longer invisible. It's a brand statement.**

The competitive case for tallow applies across a spectrum.



## Differentiation Looks Different for Different Operators

INDEPENDENT	REGIONAL / CHAIN
Flavor storytelling	Scalable consistency
Premium positioning	Operational discipline
Social shareability	Clean ingredient narrative



# BARRIERS, TESTING & *Smart Adoption*

## Honest Answers to the Most Common Hesitations

Every meaningful operational change comes with questions. Operators who have made the switch to tallow were asking the same ones, and the answers held up.

### ***"Doesn't tallow cost more?"***

Per pound, yes. Per use, no. Extended fry life means fewer oil changes over time, which reduces product cost, labor hours, disposal costs and filter maintenance. When you run the full cost-in-use equation, tallow frequently comes out ahead.

### ***"Is switching complicated?"***

No. The actual process is simple. Most operators are running normally within a single service. No new equipment. Minimal training. No disruption.

### ***"Will guests even notice?"***

The consumer data suggests yes. Dishes cooked with tallow are driving measurably higher loyalty and satisfaction scores. And operators who've made the switch report guests noticing and commenting without being told anything changed.

### ***"Why should we change what we've always done?"***

Legacy purchasing habits are the hardest barrier to address and the least data-driven. The operators who've questioned this assumption consistently report that they wish they'd done it sooner.

## Start with a Test Instead of a Commitment

You don't have to go all-in to see if a switch is right for you. Start with a partial, controlled test that generates real data from your own operation.

### A SIMPLE TESTING *framework*

- 1 Choose one fryer station.** Start with your highest-volume application, the one where fry life and consistency matter most.
- 2 Run a controlled test.** Select a single location or small group and switch in tallow. Run them through 1-2 months of normal service.
- 3 Track the right metrics.** Oil changes, labor hours, waste frequency, product consistency – and check guest reviews regularly to see when and how the flavor difference starts showing up.
- 4 Evaluate total impact.** Run the cost-per-use comparison against your test period numbers. Most operators find the math more favorable than they expected.
- 5 Expand based on results.** Let your own data drive the decision about where to go next.

# OIL IS A STRATEGIC LEVER, NOT A *Commodity*

## THE CHAIN OF IMPACT IS DIRECT

### The conditions driving tallow's rise aren't going away.

Consumers will continue scrutinizing value. Margins will continue to compress. Ingredient awareness will continue to grow. And the operators who've already made the switch will continue to benefit from the competitive advantages their competitors haven't claimed yet.

Every link in that chain is influenced by what goes in the fryer. And for the first time in decades, operators have a performance-driven reason to question the default.

Frying oil was never just a commodity. It just took the right conditions to make that visible.



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