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Breaking Yom Kippur Fast Is a Boon for Business

Restaurants and food shops specializing in Jewish cuisine gear up for the strong demand that comes with the holiday

By CHARLES PASSY

For Jews, Yom Kippur is the holiest of days, a period of fasting and somber reflection that ends with a hearty meal, simply referred to as “break fast.”

But for a number of New York City restaurants and food stores, Yom Kippur, which begins Friday night and continues through Saturday, has become something else.

Namely, a booming business opportunity.

That is because the break fast meal, which typically focuses on Jewish favorites from smoked salmon—aka

FOOD & CULTURE lox—to whitefish salad, has become a bigger social occasion in recent years,

according to people in the Jewish community and food world. It is a reflection, they say, of a growing interest in Jewish cuisine, with more establishments devoted to the fare making a go of it in the city.

It doesn't hurt that New York City's Jewish population is so large—with 1.54 million Jews in the city and some surrounding suburbs, according to the last survey, released in 2012, by the UJA-Federation of New York. That figure represents a 9% increase from the previous survey a decade earlier.

But no matter how you slice the bagel, so to speak, the post-Yom Kippur feasting can't happen without the purveyors.

“Break fast is our Super Bowl,” says Jeff Zalaznick, a managing partner with Major Food Group, the New York restaurant company behind Sadelles, a two-year-old SoHo dining spot that specializes in Jewish cuisine.

Mr. Zalaznick says Sadelles is expecting about 350 diners for its break fast meal, a \$95-a-person spread. That is almost double the number from the previous year.

At Russ & Daughters, the smoked-fish specialist with a history going back more than 100 years, the line of shoppers at its Lower East Side store snakes around the block the morning before the holi-



Eli Zabar, above, in a part of Eli's Market where High Holiday foods are found, on the Upper East Side. Below, Silverio Jay Benitez sliced smoked salmon at Sadelles in SoHo.

day begins, with some arriving as early as 5:30 a.m. “People literally come with beach chairs,” says Niki Russ Federman, a fourth-generation proprietor of the business.

And at Barney Greengrass, an Upper West Side fixture also known for smoked fish, demand is so great that the store and restaurant brings back a number of former employees—in some cases, flying them in—to help with the preparations. Owner Gary Greengrass says the staff typically works through the night leading up to Yom Kippur. As a result, “I fall asleep standing up in synagogue,” he adds.

Eli Zabar, the proprietor behind a number of markets and dining spots on the Upper East Side, notes another headache brought upon by the holiday crush. He says that his customers often come with their own serving

trays for the platters they order.

“Keeping track of people's dishes is a big problem,” Mr. Zabar says. His big holiday sellers include the traditional favorites, with particular demand for one item: his herring in cream sauce. “We probably sell more of that than in the whole rest of the year combined,” he notes.

Nationally, the High Holy Days period, which incorporates Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, translates into roughly \$480 million in sales of Jewish products with kosher certification, according to Menachem Lubinsky, president and CEO of Lubicom Marketing Consulting, a New York company that tracks the kosher market.

He couldn't say how much the break fast contributes to High Holy Day sales, but he suspects it is no small part. “This is a special meal,” he notes.



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