

FOOD

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Looking for Fame In a Downsized Chop

Tracy O'Grady Hopes Her Legacy Is a New Pork Cut

By CANDY SAGON
Special to The Washington Post

For five years, Willow executive chef Tracy O'Grady has been obsessed with doing something new with pork. Not just a new dish, but an entirely new cut of the meat that no other chef had tried.

Her requirements were simple: It had to be unique, cheap for chefs to buy and beautiful on the plate, and it had to taste like prime, juicy meat. Was that so much to ask? Evidently. "Everyone I talked to looked at me like I was a lunatic," she says.

The challenge, of course, was that pigs haven't grown new parts lately. What undiscovered portion could there be, especially these days, when many chefs are in hog heaven over such lesser-known delicacies as pork cheeks, jowls, bellies — seemingly everything but the squeal.

But O'Grady also was thinking of the chefs who made their reputations by rediscovering and promoting old-time beef cuts such as hanger steak, short ribs or, more recently, the flatiron steak. Those were all under-appreciated, inexpensive cuts with loads of flavor.

What she had in mind was a mini-rack of two cute little pork chops. Not the big, slablike chops in a tradi-



BY BILL O'LEARY — THE WASHINGTON POST

Chef Tracy O'Grady of Willow plates her signature pork rack, a novel way to prepare the small ribs from the shoulder area of the pig.

tional rack, which comes from the large middle ribs of the animal. She wanted something from the smaller ribs near the shoulder that would resemble a rack of lamb on the plate: clean, frenched bones attached to a small portion of tender, juicy, well-marbled meat.

Customers would love them, she thought. And, to be honest, it might bring her a little culinary immortal-

ity with chefs. Maybe even have a moniker like the O'Grady Rib Rack. "It's competitive out there," she says. "I wanted to create something

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• Tracy's Rib Rack Barbecue

She's Got The Chops

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that's truly unique."

It took years, but she thinks she's done it. On the menu at her Arlington restaurant last winter she unveiled a miniature rack of pork stuffed with sausage. Last month she introduced it to about 800 chefs, restaurant owners and hotel execu-

tives at a charity cook-off in Chicago. The guests loved it, the National Pork Board (which sponsored her appearance) loved it, and now she's just waiting for her idea to catch on with the rest of the country.

"What Tracy's done is both imaginative and resourceful," says Michael Batterberry, editor and publisher of Food Arts magazine, which co-sponsored last month's cook-off. Her dish "tastes good, it looks terrific on the plate, and with food costs going up relentlessly, it's also affordable. For independent restaurants, that's almost guaranteed appeal."

O'Grady's mini-rack is indeed

small; the succulent meat is about the size of a tennis ball, the bones about as tall as your pinky. The cut is from the shoulder area, what traditionally has been called country ribs. Larry Cizek, director of culinary development for the National Pork Board, describes it as "country ribs that have been upscaled."

Before she found this particular cut, O'Grady badgered every pork producer and supplier she could think of. "I called everyone. The big guys said they don't do that. The small niche producers said I had to buy the whole animal." Finally, she called George L. Wells Meat, a 100-year-old company in Lancaster, Pa. She talked to Tony Carter, who has been with the company for 40 years.

Carter calls himself "an old-school guy." He likes working with chefs, and he understood: "She wanted the toothpick, and most packers wanted to send her the tree."

So Carter found smaller packers willing to supply more manageable cuts. When he sent her a small Cryovac pouch of three country ribs with the bottom chunk of meat still attached, she knew she had her miniature rack. She removed one of the bones and a sinewy flap of meat. Then she frenched, or scraped the tops of, the remaining bones so the cut resembled a rack of two chops. The trimmings from the bone and the extra flap of meat were ground up for sausage stuffing.

Because it comes from the chuck or shoulder area, the meat is juicy and tender, thanks to its marbling.

Arrowhead Game Meats, which supplies Willow and has begun selling Tracy's Rib Rack (also called two-rib chops) to consumers, sells Berkshire pork, the pig world's equivalent of prime beef. The black hogs that produce this pork are raised by about 40 small farmers in northwest Iowa. The meat is prized in Japan, where they call it Kurobuta, or "black pig."

For the moment, Arrowhead is not selling the cut to other restaurants. "Our first priority is to Tracy and helping her get it started," says Arrowhead's John Telge.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, pork ranks third in annual meat consumption, behind beef and chicken, averaging 51 pounds per person. While pork consumption has remained stable for a decade, some worry that efforts to decrease the fat have gone too far.

Or, as Carter put it: "People don't want that other-white-meat stuff when they eat out. They want flavor, and that means fat."

Tracy's Rib Rack Barbecue

5 servings

This features a cut that Willow chef Tracy O'Grady developed after years of experimenting: basically a small, frenched rack of pork. She came up with this grilling recipe for us.

The cut is not yet locally available; the special racks can be ordered at \$7.99 per pound from Arrowhead Game Meats in Holt, Mo.; to order, contact Paradise Locker Meats at 816-370-6328. You can also try this recipe with thick-cut pork chops, which will cook more quickly; watch the internal temperature carefully to avoid overcooking.

INGREDIENTS

For the marinade

- ¾ cup red wine vinegar
- ¾ cup water
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 10 medium cloves garlic, smashed
- ⅛ teaspoon dried oregano
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 package (5 pieces, 3 to 3½ pounds) two-bone special pork rib racks, such as Tracy's Rib Rack cut (see headnote)

For the barbecue sauce

- 1 cup ketchup
- 1 cup water
- ½ cup cider vinegar
- ⅓ cup Worcestershire sauce
- ¼ cup Dijon-style mustard
- ¼ cup unsalted butter, melted
- ¼ cup light brown sugar
- 2 tablespoons freshly squeezed lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon hot pepper sauce, such as Tabasco brand
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt

DIRECTIONS

- For the marinade: Combine the vinegar, water, oil, garlic, oregano and salt. Pour over the

pork and marinate for 6 to 24 hours.

- For the barbecue sauce: Combine the ingredients in a medium saucepan over medium-high heat, mixing well. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat to low and cook for about 1 hour, until the sauce has reduced to 3 cups.
- When ready to cook, prepare the grill. If using a gas grill, heat it to medium-high. If using a charcoal grill, start the charcoal or wood briquettes; when the briquettes are ready, distribute them evenly under half the cooking area for direct heat. Oil the grate.
- Remove the rib racks from the marinade and blot dry with paper towels; discard the marinade. Grill the rib racks for about 15 minutes, turning as necessary. Move the pork to an area of the grill that is not as hot; cook for 15 minutes, basting the pork with the barbecue sauce. The pork must reach an internal temperature of 135 degrees. Transfer the racks to a cutting board for 10 to 15 minutes. Cut each rack into 2 chop pieces. Serve immediately.

NUTRITION Per serving, with about 1 tablespoon barbecue sauce: 522 calories, 37 g protein, 0 g carbohydrates, 40 g fat, 14 g saturated fat, 149 mg cholesterol, 134 mg sodium, 0 g dietary fiber. Recipe tested by Jill Grisco; e-mail questions to food@washpost.com.

