

Chick-fil-A Beats KFC for Top U.S. Chicken Chain

NEW YORK (AP) — Chick-fil-A widened its lead over rival KFC as the No. 1 chicken chain in the U.S. last year.

Preliminary data from food industry researcher Technomic shows that Atlanta-based Chick-Fil-A held the lead because its locations are much busier, even though there are far fewer of them.

Chick-fil-A first surpassed KFC as the top chicken chain in 2012. KFC is still much bigger globally.

KFC, owned by Yum Brands Inc., has been struggling in recent years, despite a variety of new menu items like boneless chicken pieces and snack cups designed to fit in a car cup holder. It even began testing a more upscale restaurant concept called "KFC eleven." Sales at established locations nevertheless fell 2 percent last year.

Chick-fil-A, which has its heaviest presence in the South, has developed a loyal following for its fried chicken sandwiches. Unlike KFC, the chain also offers a breakfast menu, giving it another way to boost sales. Chick-fil-A total U.S. sales have been growing steadily over the years and narrowing the gap with KFC, which has been suffering declines as it trims its store count.

Last year, Chick-fil-A had 1,775 locations and pulled in \$5.05 billion in sales, according to Technomic. KFC had 4,438 stores that brought in \$4.22 billion in U.S. sales.

A representative for Chick-fil-A said in an email the company was "deeply grateful" for its loyal customers as it expands into new markets. A KFC spokesman, Rick Maynard, noted in a statement that the chain "has seen a lot of competitors come and go since 1952," when it first opened.

"Colonel Sanders wasn't afraid of a little competition then, and we still welcome it today," Maynard said in the email.

Technomic gets its data by surveying companies or estimating sales based on information provided by the company.

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