

## Critics Take a Bite Out of Restaurant Week

The event features 371 participating restaurants, but some ask if it is too big for its own good

By CHARLES PASSY | Updated Jan. 19, 2016 8:58 p.m. ET



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Over the course of its 24-year history, New York's Restaurant Week has evolved into a booming program that now features a record 371 participating restaurants.

For all its growth, however, the New York program faces criticism, from industry insiders to everyday diners, that it has become too big for its own good.

The event, which began Monday and promotes discounted meals at its participating restaurants, "doesn't have the same differentiation and power of the draw that it once did," said Arlene Spiegel, a New York-based restaurant consultant.

Critics say that there are now so many participating restaurants, including ones whose everyday prices aren't so high in the first place, that the promotion doesn't carry as much weight.

NYC & Co., the official tourism agency for the city and organizer of New York Restaurant Week, said

that the increased number of restaurants joining its program speaks to its value, as does the continued demand from diners for the deals.

Some participating restaurants said they see a meaningful uptick in business during the promotion, even if the checks are generally lower. The program helps bring in patrons who might not otherwise visit, and the hope is that some of them return.

New York Restaurant Week was started in 1992 by Zagat guide co-founder Tim Zagat and the late New York restaurateur Joe Baum as a way to drive business when delegates were in town for the Democratic National Convention. In that first year, just 94 restaurants participated.

The agency sees limits to how large Restaurant Week will become. Despite the steady increase in program participants over the years, the concern is to maintain the event's significance and special place on the calendar. ●