

Bareburger made its mark on New York burgers by focusing on the source

The restaurant chain works to stick with sustainable ingredients like the grass-fed beef that had been popular at the owner's Clinton Hill bar. *By Adrienne Pasquarelli*

As the economy tanked in 2008, only one thing was selling well at Sputnik, Euripides Pelekanos' Clinton Hill nightclub: grass-fed burgers. Pelekanos returned to Astoria, where he grew up, to capitalize on the burger's success. In 2009, with his brother, three partners and about \$450,000, he opened a tiny restaurant called Bareburger, where he spent 10 hours a day flipping meat.

The timing was perfect. Despite charging slightly higher prices for burgers made from organic beef and exotic meats such as ostrich or elk, Pelekanos had tapped into the healthy eating craze with a menu offering something for everyone, including a growing population of vegans and vegetarians.

"For people in 2009 to pay \$11 or \$12 for a burger when we're in the middle of a recession, that really struck a chord," said Pelekanos, who also serves as chief executive. "People were just starting to care about where their food came from." As an early adopter of local, sustainable ingredients, the eatery resonated even more with consumers.

"Bareburger identified an emerging trend in the mainstream public to eat 'better for you' foods but with an unwillingness to give up what they love, burgers," said Arlene Spiegel, a restaurant industry consultant. The company has followed a time-tested model of perfecting its local marketing and operating systems before franchising its brand, she noted.

Within eight months of Bareburger's debut, a second location opened in Greenwich Village.



The chain now has 28 stores, 17 of which are in New York City. It recently expanded to Tokyo. About half are franchises, though the company will focus on corporate-owned sites in coming months. Pelekanos expects to open 16 more restaurants by mid-2017.

One growing pain has been finding honest food distributors operating all-natural farms near the new eateries. "It's such an integral part of our business," Pelekanos said. "The product is the product, and you have to verify that it is what they say it is." ■