



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY ERIK R. BISHOFF

Fine dining?

BY JARED PABEN
NEWS EDITOR

Whether it's a vice or simply living easy, Americans are doing a lot of it.

Eating out has become a multi-billion-dollar business in the United States. So many Americans enjoy eating out that the nation's 900,000 restaurants are projected to haul in \$476 billion in sales this year and have an economic impact of \$1.2 trillion, according to the National Restaurant Association's 2005 Restaurant Industry Forecast.

And whether it's because more Americans are eating out, or because Americans are eating out more, the nation's commercial kitchens are expected to be even busier this year — projected sales are a full 4.9 percent higher than last year's. That averages to \$1,610.95 for every American this year, enough to buy about 332 large Big Mac meals for every American, or almost enough for one each day for a year.

To the Oregon Restaurant Association these numbers mean a booming economy, families spending time together and less time cooking and cleaning up.

To others, eating out a lot means spending too much money and eating foods that aren't as healthy as home-cooked meals.

ORA spokeswoman Elizabeth Peters said the impacts of the restaurant industry on Oregon's economy are hard to miss. In the state, about 110,000 people are employed by restaurants, not including support industries, making it the No. 1 private-sector employer in the state.

"Every time you go out to eat you're having an impact on the economy," she said.

Peters said an obvious advantage to eating at a restaurant is not having to cook and clean up, which is well suited for the busy lifestyles of college students.

According to the NRA, 72 percent of adults say carry-out meals and delivery give them more time to spend on other activities and are a better use of time than cooking and cleaning up.

"We're finding that more and more Americans are welcoming (the chance) to spend time with their family, rather than cooking and cleaning up," Peters said.

Peters said eating out can cost more than eating at home, depending on the food one cooks at home. This is because when you eat out, you're paying not only for the product, but for everyone who was involved in the delivery and preparation of the product.

Forty-three percent of adults said eating out is as cost-effective as

convenience ranks as a top choice for eating out, but it can be expensive and unhealthy for those who make it a habit

cooking and cleaning up at home, according to the NRA.

University Health Educator Kristen Olmos is one of the 57 percent who don't see eating out as cost effective.

It may seem like students are spending more money when they go to the grocery store and stock up, but in reality that food will make more meals than one would get spending that same money eating out, she said.

"It is way more expensive to eat your meals away from home," Olmos said.

University students also pointed to the high cost of eating out on a regular basis.

"A good amount of my money every month goes to food and eating out," junior Zach Payne said.

Payne said eating out is more convenient because he doesn't have a car and can't easily get to the grocery store.

University sophomore Lilly Harris said she often eats at home because she gets food stamps, but she does eat out for lunch. She occasionally packs a lunch, saving herself as much as \$25 per week that would otherwise go toward eating out.

She did say that the convenience of eating out can make it appealing.

"It's easier. You don't have to

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