

The rising cost and challenges with Stuft

By Ukeme Offiong

In 2011, Stuft started as a hot sauce company, and then turned into a food truck, and later became a restaurant. It's now located at 24 Mallory Street, Phoebus, Virginia.

“Stuft is more than just a place to eat, it's where people gather.”

The restaurant has an extensive menu of Mexican cuisine. This restaurant has had its set of challenges, and they have had to raise their prices.

A frequent patron of the restaurant, Krystal said, “My favorite is bulgogi cheesesteak egg rolls, and I did notice an increase in prices at Stuft.”

The Bulgogi Cheesesteak Rolls are one of the more popular dishes that are served at the restaurant. Since all of the Stuft restaurant's items are freshly made, that means they are most labor-intensive; for example, the staff handrolls 84,000 eggrolls a year. Other restaurants will use pre-made items, which brings labor costs down and food costs down.

One of the owners of Stuft, Casey, said, "Prices have been rising for quite a while. I think it just takes the public to understand, and for a long time, I'm sure a lot of companies took the loss because they didn't want to up the price."

Stuft started raising their prices 2 years ago for the first time, and they did hear some negative feedback.

The general manager, Katie, talked about how the price increase was necessary for Stuft so that they could continue to stay open and serve the community.

She stated, "We also believe that our food has excellent value for the money. Large portion sizes and excellent service."

She spoke further on how everything is expensive, from insurance to tariffs, equipment prices, environmental factors, farmer shortage, and rising production costs.

Another challenge that Stuft faces is that the business is still affected by COVID-19 today.

Katie said, "For a long time, since COVID, we struggled to find back-of-house employees. During COVID, with restaurants shut down, many culinary agents left the industry for other career options. This left many restaurants stranded without

knowledgeable cooks or prep. We have a great team now, but we trained much of our staff from scratch, who had zero experience.”

She touched on why steak and chicken became more expensive, and a big part of that was COVID. Steaks went from 3.89/lb to 6.20/lb in 3 months.

There was a lack of ranch hands five years ago, who couldn't assist with cattle, and that meant that herds were brought to slaughter at an increased rate.

This created a surplus in the market, and it actually takes 5 years to raise cattle that are the proper size and which created a huge shortage in the market.

This summer, a lot of chickens were being killed because of the bird flu. Prices shot up after that, going from \$67/case to \$120/case.

Summer, a manager/bartender, spoke about how they re-did their business model and how they used to appeal to the younger crowd. They used to have a cigarette lounge, now a game room, as they are trying to be more family-friendly.

Along with some menu changes, Stuft has made some interior changes. The restaurant added more low-top seating, patio expansion, a party room, a merch room, and all seats now have backs to them.

With all of the problems that the restaurant is facing, Stuft still wants patrons to "Come hungry, leave happy, and get Stuft."

Sources

Grammarly

<https://stuftstreetfood.com/>