Thank your local farmer for your Super Bowl wings

Having been raised in Missouri, I became a Chiefs fan when they won Super Bowl IV. I have waited a long time to see them in another Super Bowl, let alone win. Many things have changed in the game over this time, which includes the food eaten during game time.

Like many other people, I enjoy eating chicken wings. As I viewed the game and savored the wings, I thought about how wings have become a favorite over the years.

I can remember the day when the wing was something you cut off to get to the good part of the chicken. Of course, those were the days when people knew how to cut up a whole chicken.

I am grateful that my father insisted I learn how to cut up a chicken. Those were the days when the chicken breast made two halves and a wishbone (and KFC still had a leg).

It is unfortunate that individuals these days do not get a piece with a wishbone — all those wishes that individuals do not get to make by pulling the wishbone apart.

However, let us get back to wings.

It was at college when I first encountered retail wings or a part of a wing at a seafood restaurant that included “peg legs” on the menu. However, decades before (in the early 1960s), a bar in Buffalo, New York, was given credit for creating what we now know as Buffalo wings.

The owner cooked leftover wings in a hot sauce as a late night snack for her children and friends. They went over so well that the owner added them to the menu the very next day.

The maker of the hot sauce took the concept on the road where the idea spread across the country. The appetizer did not become mainstream, though, until the 1980s. This is when health-conscious consumers started preferring boneless, skinless chicken breasts, leaving the wings as a byproduct.

As a result, restaurant and bars realized they could charge low prices for the relatively inexpensive wings and, by adding sauces, customers would consume more beverages with the wings. Fast-food restaurants soon followed with their own menu items in the early nineties, such as McDonald’s Mighty Wings, KFC’s Hot Wings, and Domino’s Pizza wings.

About this time, emerging technology allowed sports bars to have multiple TV screens, and satellite dishes allowed more broadcasts of sporting events. Football and wings were a perfect fit.

Wings were easy to prepare, affordable, and shared easily in a group. Their consumption has been increasing with each Super Bowl.

The National Chicken Council estimates that over 1.2 billion wing portions are consumed during Super Bowl weekends. They estimated that if the wings were laid end to end, they would have stretched from San Francisco to Baltimore 27 times.

The same council states that 4 out of 5 Americans eat chicken wings. About evenly split, women as well as men consume chicken wings. Surveys show that ranch dressing is the favorite dipping sauce followed next by barbecue and then hot sauce.

Food services have names for the three parts of a chicken wing: The small, thin segment at the third joint is called the flapper, the mini-drumstick is a drummette and the remaining middle part is the flat.

Local farmers may not have grown the chickens that provided the wings. However, corn and soybean meal are important components of feed for the poultry industry, and part of the corn and soybeans harvested in our area goes to the poultry industry.

So, as you munch on wings at your next sporting event, thank a local farmer. Bon appétit!

Lentz is extension educator for agriculture and natural resources for the Ohio State University Extension Service in Hancock County. He can be reached at 419-422-3851 or via email at lentz.38@osu.edu