

Endwell Marinade Maker Hopes for Spiedi Success

By STEVE HAMBALEK

Is the world ready for a prepared spiedi marinade selling for about 69 cents a bottle?

Robert A. Salamida, 24, of 2701 Country Club Road, Endwell, hopes so, because he is making, bottling and marketing what is believe to be the first of its kind. And, although he is young, aggressive and confident about the future of the sauce, it remains to be seen whether he will succeed. But the fact remains that he is trying.

The label on the bottle says it is "Salamida's original State Fair Spiedie Sauce/marinade/8 fluid ounces." He has anglicised the spelling of the Italian word, "spiedi," one reason being that he feels it looks better on the bottle.

Rob Salamida, as he likes to be known, is aware of just about all of the problems that go along with spiedi. They are many.

One is that cold spiedis leave most eaters cold, if not disgusted. Another is that the freezing of marinated meat leaves it mushy, a charitable word. Still another is that many old-timers prefer to make their own spiedi marinades. Still, there is no gainsaying the fact that there are thousands of spiedi lovers who do not know how to make a marinade and maybe are ready to buy a bottle of Salamida's.

Salamida thought up the idea of selling

spiedi at a booth at the New York State Fair the week of Labor Day, 1971. It was not easy to get permission to set up the business, but he got in, during a hectic eight days in which he had to estimate how much meat and bread he would need and how to refrigerate it.

He worked his way through college selling spiedi for 35 cents a stick in the front of bars. In time, inflation — the unholy-high costs of buying the meat and paying to have it trimmed — swamped him.

That's when he began to think seriously of producing and marketing a marinade for whatever meat the buyer wanted to roast. He got a bunch of recipes, ran them through a computer, and started bottling the result last fall.

He had to get a license from the state Department of Agriculture and Markets to make the marinade. He named the sauce after the one he used at the state fair, designed the label (money-saving use of two colors, red and blue on white paper), bought the bottles, and filled them with his mixture. He still has a human assembly line filling the bottles to save about \$30,000 for the necessary machinery.

For the benefit of those who have managed to live so long in this part of the world without coming into contact with spiedi, they are pieces of meat that has been

marinated and roasted over an open fire and served on a slice of Italian bread.

The legend is that Camille Iacovelli and Tony Sbarra first started to sell lamb meat spiedis in front of a bar on the North Side of Endicott during the deeply depressed 1930s.

One can easily leave the Triple Cities area and never again see a spiedi or spiedi sign, with these possible exceptions: places now home to former residents of this area who treasure their memories of picnics featuring pieces of lamb roasted over a hot charcoal stove.

Unfortunately, the moon-shot of prices has included that of the legs of lamb that were cut up, by experts with the touches of surgeons, to provide spiedi meat free of fat, bone and gristle.

The price of lamb rose so high that most vendors chose not to make the spiedi meat, a decision unquestionably helped by the hundreds of customers who could no longer pay, say, \$2.30 a pound for it. Some vendors are using pork instead. Others mix good beef, such as sirloin tips, with lamb, the thoughtful ones putting up signs to that effect.

Less thoughtful vendors think nothing of tossing their beef, pork, veal and maybe lamb scraps into a marinade made up mostly of vinegar and selling it as spiedi meat. The telltale sign usually is the unusually low price.



PRESS PHOTO BY DAVE TINNEY

Robert A. Salamida with bottles of his spiedi marinade.