

Sausage Fest: Southside Market & Barbecue and Meyer's Elgin Smokehouse

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This is the inaugural entry for Sausage Fest, an Eating...Our Words analysis of all things tubular.



Nothing says "I love you" like sausage.

Written in red block letters on a sign between the two service counters at [Southside Market & Barbecue](#), this dandy of a slogan is slapped atop a black and white image of a smiling old man holding a pan of Elgin Hot Sausage right about waist level. His wife smiles right behind him, helping along the visual pun for the juvenile-minded.

Photos by Keith Plocek



By official state legislative decree, Elgin is the Sausage Capital of Texas, and Southside Market & Barbecue is the town's original link house. Here you'll find the original Elgin Hot Sausage, an all beef, peppered tube of legend.

Southside has changed family ownership a few times since 1886, back when a butcher named William J. Moon first set up shop on Central Street in this Hill Country burg, but the hot links reputedly have remained the same. The Bracewell family bought the business in 1968 and moved the operation in 1992 to its current location, an abandoned bank building on HWY 290. The sprawling compound now produces and sells somewhere around two million pounds of sausage a year.

Think of it as an amusement park devoted to meat. On a recent Sunday, I walked in and immediately was offered a free sample of beef ribs by a fellow minding the door. Pork ribs followed while I was in line. (Take that, Costco.) Long tables are shoved together in the compound's two dining areas, giving the seating layout the feel of a union hall or a school cafeteria. There's a counter devoted to Blue Bell, another to the meat market, and two zigzagging lines lead to two more counters serving up cooked fare. Bored while standing in line? Just watch in-house commercials on the TVs perched above the queue. Want a souvenir besides indigestion? Head over to the gift shop when you're done.

I ordered a traditional (at least in my family) Texas combo of a sausage sandwich and a bottle of Big Red, and headed to the larger dining hall, which was decked with carcasses of bucks, bears and bobcats, not to mention the occasional homage to the Aggie bonfire.

The sandwich was as simple as pleasure: two slices of white bread, a clump of pickles, a pile of onions, and two pieces of link sliced lengthwise, equaling four rows of beefy goodness. These Elgin Hot Guts, as the old-timers called them, aren't particularly hot. Apparently the pepper content was lowered back in the 1970s to broaden the product's appeal, and even though you can still see black flecks in the links, there's not a whole lot of bite. That can be remedied with the bottles of Elgin Hot Sauce placed on every table, so long as you don't mind pickling your tongue with vinegar.

Elgin didn't get to be the Sausage Capital of Texas on the basis on Southside alone, and [Meyer's Elgin Smokehouse](#) easily occupies the spot of number two, although, based on the way Meyer's has flanked 290 with billboards hocking its sausage, the company doesn't seem content with a second-place ranking. (Google "Elgin sausage," and Meyer's comes up first.) That same Sunday I headed down the road to Meyer's and ordered up another beef sausage sandwich and Big Red, and I found a decidedly more somber atmosphere. An amusement park, this joint is not. There are no multi-family tables, no overhead videos, less taxidermy and a smaller gift shop; one counter for the meat market and ice cream, another for ordering ready-to-eat vittles, where you call out your order to the slicer and watch her work while paying the man up front.

A young'un on the Elgin scene (the full-blown operation was established in 1949, although the family's been making sausage for four generations), Meyer's doesn't have the flair of Southside, but that's not to say the links aren't top notch. The first kiss might be the sweetest, but that second sausage sandwich was just as good as – and even a little bit juicier than – the one up the road. There's something about the squirt of water that just makes a link taste literally gutsier. Black flecks also peppered these four rows of meat, but there still wasn't a whole lot of kick. A bottle on the table warned that the hot pepper vinegar sauce within was "HOT!!" ...and let's just say European immigrants are wusses.



On the way out the door, I moseyed towards the Blue Bell bins, ready for a little sweetness, but I got sidetracked by the promise of the house specialty: pork garlic sausage. I ordered a single wrapped in a slice of white. Your typical sausage purist might dismiss the small chunks of garlic as a bell or whistle, but the Meyer family already has proven they can do the real deal, so who's to blame them for mixing it up a bit. That additional texture of flavor, not to mention the grease from the pork, really coated the tongue at the end.

Goodbye, Blue Bell. Somebody's got a new dessert. – [Keith Plocek](#)