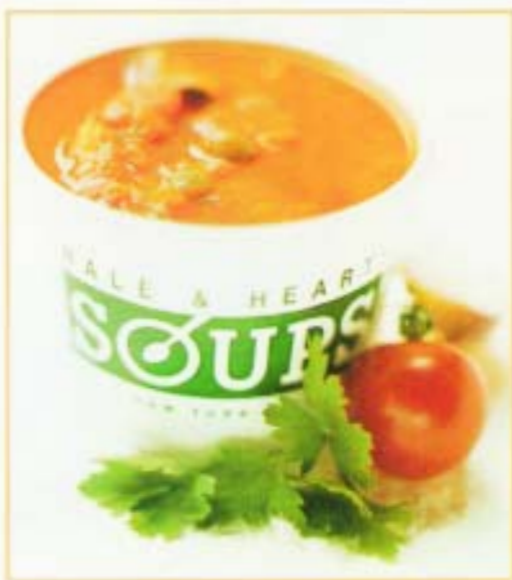


SOUP IS HOT

Following closely on the heels of coffee and bagels, soup appears to be the next food obsession. Representing today's boiling-hot soup market is Hale and Hearty Soups, which has six locations in New York and ladles out up to a 100 gallons—or a hefty 1,600 cups—of soup a day. Co-founder Andrew Schnipper says the 3-year-old concept tallies more than \$1 million in annual sales.



In Massachusetts, New England Soup Factory sells 100 gallons daily at units in Brookline and Newton. Though its menu also offers sandwiches, salads and prepared entrees, co-owner and Soup-chef Marjorie Druker says soup earns 60% of total sales. "Soup is our anchor," she says.

Steaming soup warms the bluster of early spring. Come June, though, its appeal cools. That's when New England Soup Factory flips to its summer menu, featuring chilled soups, plus hot soups with lighter broths and fresh summer vegetables. Says Druker, sales drop only about 10% a day.

Hale and Hearty's chilled soups—spiced apple and carrot-dill are two—are less popular. "Even in summer, hot soups outsell cold ones," Schnipper says, noting that sales fall about 25% June through August.

Schnipper doesn't sweat the slow months. "Things pick up quickly in September," he says, "and actually, it's kind of nice to be quiet for awhile."