



STRATEGIES FOR MENU PLANNING: BALANCING COST, LABOR, AND COMPLIANCE

COMPILED BY ANFP STAFF

1. **Assess costs.** Managing food costs starts with menu planning. Your menu dictates the cost of serving the food, the labor hours necessary, the skillset of your kitchen staff, and the supplies and equipment needed to make it all happen.
2. **Evaluate labor.** Consider your staff's skill level before creating menu items that may require more experience. Likewise, don't waste their talents on heat-and-serve items if you have a skilled staff.
3. **Consider regulations.** Nutrition and operational regulations must be considered. They ensure well-balanced meals are served in a safe manner and affect everything from food variety, portion size, nutrient values, allergens, and even the time the meal is served.
4. **Contemplate menu philosophy.** Review your foodservice goals and determine whether you have a fine-dining brand, a value-dining focus, or something in between. Identifying a clear brand before writing your menu will help you choose the right items to align with that goal.
5. **Determine budget.** Make sure your budget fits your dining brand. Use industry benchmarks to determine the budget needed to execute your planned menu. Misalignment here can create failure.
6. **Explore equipment needs.** Before featuring an item on your menu, make sure your kitchen is equipped to prepare it. Substituting a prep method or cooking device jeopardizes quality and safety.
7. **Optimize products.** Getting creative to reduce costs demands a close eye on procurement best practices to ensure you are purchasing and streamlining products to enable maximum cost savings.
8. **Evaluate menu items.** Using a single item across two or more dishes is best practice. Take the time to evaluate products and prioritize them into multiple items on the menu.
9. **Manage inventory.** The line between overstocking and understocking in any foodservice operation is thin. It requires close attention to detail, which is achieved by creating order lists, establishing par levels, and performing routine inventory checks.
10. **Measure outcomes.** Staying on top of your budget is imperative in order to accurately detail your food, labor, and expenses, as well as your incoming revenue. Successful operators take tracking a step further for a better outcome by including benchmarking of key performance indicators.

To learn more, read "Your Menu at the Root of Cost Control" by Dana Fillmore, RD, *Nutrition & Foodservice Edge*, November-December 2023.

Find previous Top 10 lists at www.ANFPonline.org/top10