

In running any professional kitchen, two of the most important things to do are to **think and work ahead**. If the first time you give any thought to a particular day's menu and recipes is the day they are going to be served, things will probably not go well.

The place where all of your planning starts is the dated menu. This menu, along with knowing how many people you are serving, will tell you what you need to order, what you need to prep, what you need to serve and when you will need to do it all.

Here are some of the areas you'll need to think about in advance, all based on your dated menu:

Ordering

Without the right amount of the right ingredients on hand, even the best kitchen crew in the world wouldn't be able to prepare and serve the meals their guests are expecting.

The **Recipes & Rotations Order List Report** is a valuable tool to help you with this process. By simply specifying a date range, the program will generate a list of all the ingredients you'll need to produce all of the items on the menu for those days. The correct amount for each ingredient will be shown, based on the number of portions you've already chosen for each meal period or meal part. All applicable yields are taken into account.

Be sure to consider what you already have in your inventory before placing an order. There is space on the Order List Report for you to include this information.

The Order List Report also lists items that aren't part of the regular menu rotation that you're likely to need, like plastic wrap, latex gloves and food thickeners. Substitute items that appear on the Modified Diet Spreadsheets, like no sugar-added pies, are also listed.

In addition, there are a number of blank spaces on the Order List Report so that you can add any other items that you'll need.

The next step after placing an accurate, complete order is **receiving**. When checking in orders, be sure to use *your order form*, not just the vendor's invoice. If his invoice says 50 pounds of russet potatoes, and he delivers 50 pounds of russet potatoes, but you ordered 100 pounds, the best place to notice and correct the mistake is at the time of delivery.

Use a scale frequently, rotate your stock, and keep all storage areas clean, organized, well-lit and at the right temperature.

Prepping

Well-planned kitchen prep makes all the difference in the world to the quality and consistency of the food you serve, as well as to your food and labor costs. It also goes a long way in creating and maintaining a happy and loyal kitchen staff.

Always look ahead several days on your Weekly Menu Report to see what can be prepped ahead of the day it's served. While you don't want to overdo it, being ahead by a day or two when appropriate offers a nice safety net when things go wrong. It's better to have 48 hours to correct a mistake than 2.

Give some thought to what will be best to do ahead. Dressings and vinaigrettes will keep fine for several days if properly stored. So will stews, like Chicken Cacciatore. The base for Shrimp Creole can be done a day or two ahead, but add and cook the seafood just before it's served. Fried Catfish or Steamed Broccoli should be done just before service, although you can certainly complete the breading components and trim the Broccoli ahead of time.

The **Recipes & Rotations Weekly Menus, Daily Menus and Scaled Recipes** are important tools for the successful preparation of the food your kitchen needs to produce. Post all of them prominently in your kitchen. The Weekly Menus give your staff an overview of what's coming, the Daily Menus of what's happening on a specific day, and the Scaled Recipes detailed instructions of how to make each dish in the correct quantity.

Defrosting

Defrosting takes time. The best way to defrost something is to take it out of the freezer and place it in a pan, in its original packaging, in a refrigerator that's at <40°F. This is the best method in terms of maintaining the quality of the product as well as safety. It also requires you to **think ahead**. Use the Weekly Menu Report as a guide, and give each item the time it needs to defrost, in many cases a couple of days.

If the item is considered hazardous when raw, like chicken, be sure to place it on a bottom shelf in the cooler.

An alternative is to place the wrapped item in a prep sink (not a hand sink) and allow cold water to flow continuously over it till thawed. This works best with smaller items, like 5-pound blocks of shrimp. As soon as the product is defrosted, transfer it to a refrigerator that's at <40°F.

Staffing

Along with food, staffing is your highest cost. Just like with food, you have to perform a real balancing act. Too much, and your costs get out of control. Too little, and your product suffers.

In a way, controlling your food costs is easier. The **Recipes & Rotations Order List Report**, along with other features of the program, give you tools to come very close to optimum food costs for your operation.

Human beings will always be more of a challenge than inanimate food products. Any consideration you put into doing what you can to help your staff be as happy with you as you want to be with them will be rewarded.

Give thought to the amount of time and effort it will take to prepare and serve the meals on the menu. If you've already had a good bit of experience with scratch cooking, this will be easy. If not, it makes sense to allot more staff and time to the task than you think – especially in the beginning. This will stack the deck in your favor. If appropriate, you can always scale back your staff as you see they can do more work in less time, or you realize you've padded your staff more than necessary.

You may want to consider using more prepared foods, at least at first, as an option. You can stay very close to the menu rotation, but with lower labor costs, by substituting appropriate prepared foods for the "home-made" versions included with the **Recipes & Rotations** program. (Realize, this may require alterations to the Modified Diet Spreadsheets.)

Kitchen Service

This is where the rubber meets the road, and the fruits of all your labor of planning, ordering, prepping and sanitation. As far as your residents are concerned, it's the only part that counts.

If all of your other efforts leading up to service have been done well, service should be easy.

If you've done your prep correctly, you'll have the right amount of all of the right foods you'll need. (Assuming proper portioning is followed.)

Make sure that all of those foods are being held at the temperatures indicated on the recipes: generally <40°F for cold foods and >140°F for hot foods.

Getting the service line set up on time is very important.

Make sure that you give your staff all the tools they'll need to serve those foods attractively, easily and in the correct portions. Tongs, spoons, slotted spoons, ladles, scoops, clean side towels, gloves, serving plates and anything else they'll need should be available in the quantities they'll need to do a good job.

Major pieces of equipment like ovens, stoves, fryers, grills and steamers should all be in good, working order.

The Modified Diet Spreadsheet for the day should be on each of the service lines for all to see and use.

Have sufficient, trained staff scheduled, including stewards, to do a good job.

A well-supervised crew will always perform better, and no place is more important for this than service time. A manager should always be scheduled to oversee each meal's service, both in the kitchen *and* dining room.

Sanitation

Excellent sanitation is important in all kitchens, but especially when your guests consist of a high-risk population. For an overview of good, basic, kitchen sanitation practices, please see the separate document under "Sanitation" on the Resources Menu.