

"Food Control"

Managing food preparation is critical to ensuring the profitability of the food offer at your service station. This is especially important if you have a non-branded or own-branded offer and you are responsible to decide how and what is prepared.

There are 3 key areas in doing this:

- Recipes
 - In a food offer you shouldn't prepare any item without having a written recipe. This ensures that you always provide the same standard, taste and quantities. International food offerings like McDonalds standardise every single part of the food preparation process, from ingredients to cooking times and seasoning. This is why customers trust these brands to provide consistent portions and taste.
 - Stock control can also be improved by using a stock system that provides for setting up recipes. If you don't have the administrative capacity to manage recipes in the back office, try to run your top 20% sellers on a recipe basis – that way you'll at least control 80% of your sales.
- Food costing
 - Once you have a recipe the next step is to calculate the food costing. Remember to include

not only the ingredients, but also condiments and packaging e.g. serviettes, tomato sauce sachet, spoons, etc to determine the final cost. You'll also need to account for production wastage e.g. the last bit of sauce left in the pan, oil used for frying, etc

- Portion control
 - The next critical step is portion control. You can have recipes and accurate food costing, but if portions are not controlled all your work is for nothing. Portion control applies to preparation and dishing up. Customers are famous for influencing employees to "add a little extra" which satisfies the customer but cripples the profitability of that serving.
 - Train your employees on how portion control works and why it is important for the profitability of each serving.

A final tip is to train your employees to "clean as you work". It is much easier to spot control issues if the food preparation area is neat and organised. Also if you insist that employees keep a production sheet it's easy to do spot checks on stock levels. Lastly, remember to keep waste separately and only allow it to be thrown out at specific times and written up under management control.

BEST PRACTICES:

DON'T forget to include production waste in your food costing. For example the weight of leftovers in the serving dish or the half-portion that never gets sold should be accounted for in the food costing.

DON'T forget to include consumables in your food costing e.g. water, oil and spices.

DON'T allow your employees to buy expired food products at cost or cheaper, this only provides an incentive to over produce.

DO remember that recipes should ideally be simple, standardised and easy to use – otherwise your employees will find it easier to make up their own recipes. Also, if you issue only the recipe quantities they are forced to cook according to the recipe.

DO remember to use the raw weight when calculating food cost and not the cooked weight. For example cooking chicken reduces the weight by up to 30%. Therefore 1kg of raw chicken may reduce to only 700g when cooked.

QUICK WINS:

It is often easier to standardise portions and recipes by using the same measuring tools. For example, using a standardised measuring cup for ingredients and dishing up will simplify the process for employees. It also makes it easier for employees to explain portions to customers. One example of this is ice cream parlours – you pay extra for every scoop of ice cream and all scoops are the same size.

Ingredients are controlled best if you have pre-packed or pre-portioned ingredients. Chips are a great example of this – when you receive a box of frozen chips you can pre-portion and pack them in individual packets of the same weight. This makes it easy to count, but also easy to prepare as each serving equals one packet. Some items are difficult to pre-portion e.g. spices, tomatoes and lettuce. Where possible pre-portion the high risk or expensive items such as cheese and meat.

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