

Foodservice Updates

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Rethink your proteins

You're no doubt scrutinizing your menu amid ongoing inflation and supply shortages – and animal proteins, which are among the higher-priced foods that consumers and restaurant operators alike are paying for right now, are a key target for reinvention. Consumers are buying less meat at the grocery store due to higher prices and won't be surprised to see more expensive meat (or fewer beef options) on the menu at the moment. So what's the best alternative course of action? In addition to pork, which should continue to be a value option, poultry is likely to be a viable choice in the coming months. According to research from BTIG, poultry is due to see substantial deflation in the first quarter of 2023, even as beef prices are poised to continue their climb. In the meantime, while plant-based proteins continue to have an important place at the center of the plate, plant-based beef sales have dipped. (At a time when restaurant meals may be harder to justify, consumers may be more inclined to splurge on the experience of a beef burger over a plant-based one.) Restaurants may benefit by being extra purposeful with the beef-based options on the menu so they feel more experiential. Feature premium cuts as specials. Get creative with less expensive cuts by using them in flavorful marinades featuring on-trend spices. Offer slow-cooked beef to elevate the melt-in-your-mouth experience that helps you make the most of the beef you're able to buy right now.



The rise of precision forecasting

If there is a silver lining to the past couple of years in the restaurant industry, it could be that operators have become significantly more nimble. Technology has supported this transition, enabling restaurants to monitor and measure everything from ingredient waste to menu profitability. Expect even more fine-tuning as restaurants continue to manage steep operating costs. That will include greater precision when it comes to not just ingredient use, but also the prediction of exactly what ingredients a restaurant will need in the near future. Chipotle, for one, is piloting a “cook-to-needs” kitchen management system in select California stores that provides demand-based cooking and ingredient preparation forecasts, according to a Restaurant Technology News report. The goal of the system is to help each restaurant make the most of its ordered ingredients, maximize freshness and minimise food waste. The report said the system uses artificial intelligence and machine learning to monitor ingredient levels in real time, then notifies the team how much to prepare, cook and when to start cooking. This information then feeds data collection that supports real-time production planning for each restaurant.



How intuitive is your tech?

The ease with which your guests and staff can use your technology for placing and processing orders, as well as for making and accepting payment, can have a significant impact on everyone’s satisfaction. Your staff and guests will have different comfort levels when it comes to handling such tasks as navigating your menu and making a payment, or plugging a gift card into a tablet or splitting a check. Making these processes intuitive for as broad a subset of people as possible will help leave guests with a better impression, give them more confidence that they will receive the food they want, minimize the amount of time you need to spend training staff to use a new system, and can help ensure your tech is actively making your team’s jobs easier, faster and less prone to error. When you take a look at your current system, where are there snags are areas that could be improved?



Protein plus penne with Italian sausage and kale

Ingredients:

20 Oz. Barilla® protein plus penne
20 Oz. Italian sausage, no casing
2 Tbsp. Extra virgin olive oil
3 Garlic cloves, minced
5 Oz. Baby kale
¾ Cup dry white wine
32 Oz. Strained tomatoes
¾ Cup pecorino, grated
Salt & black pepper to taste

Does your pasta give back?

Remember when eating pasta felt like a guilty pleasure? It doesn't have to anymore, thanks to the plethora of options available that can suit not only guests sensitive to gluten, but also those simply looking for their pasta to pack a more nutritious punch than the conventional variety. It's an extra benefit when those alternative options don't feel like a big sacrifice in the taste department. Consider offering options made from beans, chickpeas or lentils, fortified with protein and fiber, or made from sprouted grain.

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Instructions:

1. In a skillet over medium heat add olive oil and sausage.
2. Break sausage apart and cook until brown, about 2-3 minutes.
3. Meanwhile, bring a pot of water to a boil and cook pasta according to package directions.
4. Add garlic to the meat and cook an additional minute. Add kale, cooking another minute.
5. Add wine and reduce by half.
6. Add tomato sauce and bring to a simmer.
7. Drain pasta and add to the sauce with ½ of the cheese, and toss well.
8. Garnish with remaining cheese.

Recipe and photo courtesy of Barilla

The importance of just-in-time traceability

If one of your guests were to get sick after eating with you, how quickly could you identify the source of the problem and, if necessary, eliminate it from your menu? Your ability to digitally trace each ingredient on your menu back to its source – and to do so quickly – can help you contain the problem before it impacts more guests and damages your restaurant’s reputation. As you work with suppliers day to day, ensure they can provide standardized data to trace ingredients with transparency. Understand how they will track an ingredient through the system, alert you in the event of a problem, and how easily they can be reached if you have an issue.

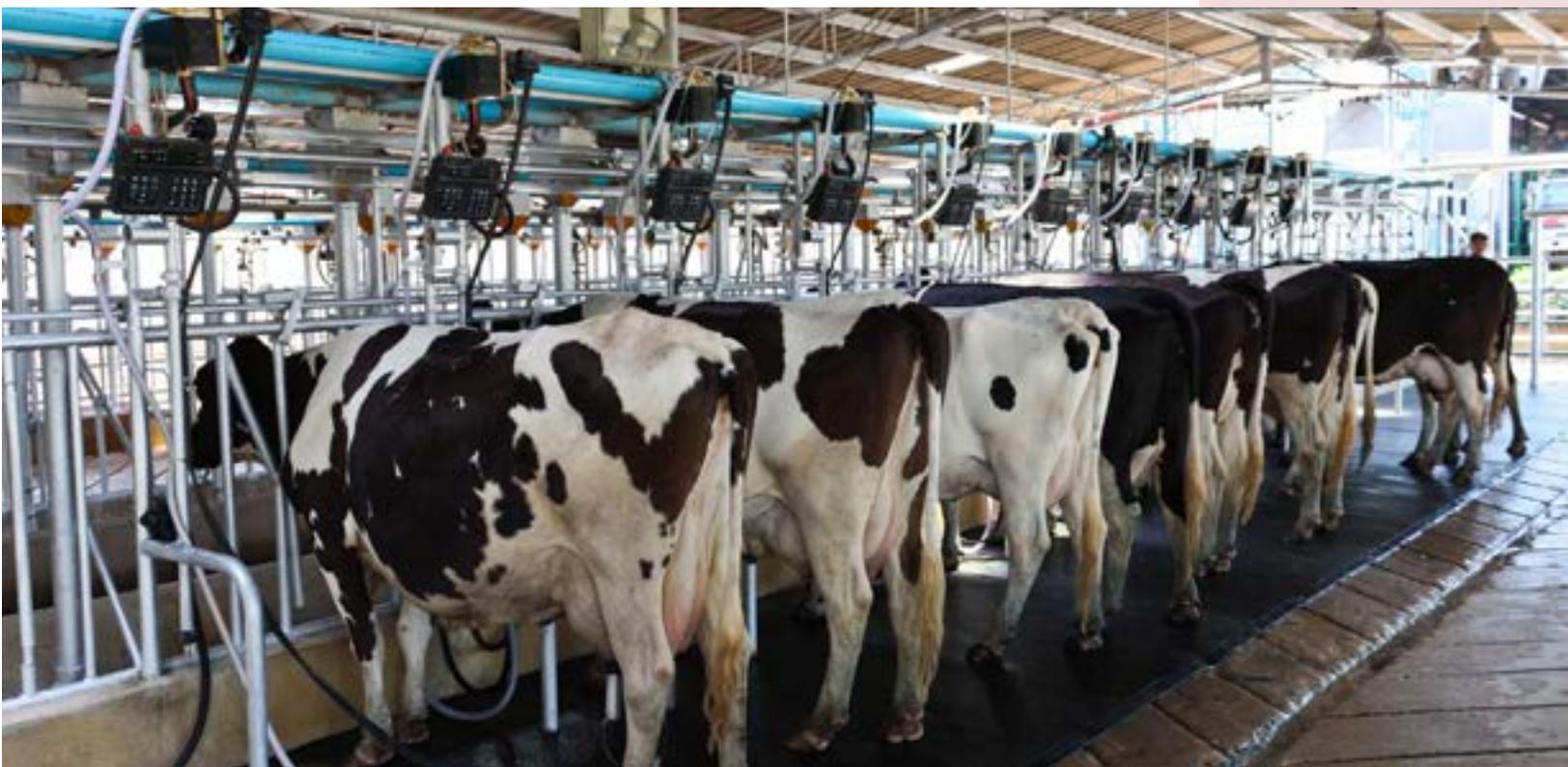
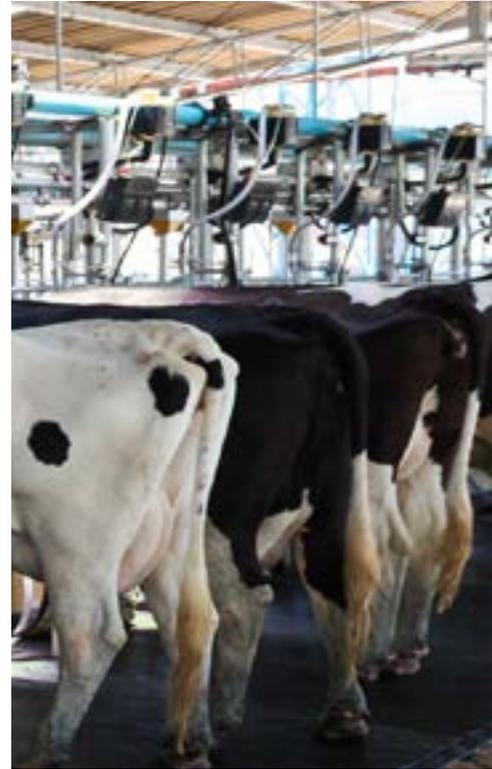


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Anticipate how new Farm Bill will impact your business

As of this writing, the Farm Bill – the most significant piece of legislation related to agriculture – was due to be negotiated in Congress. The current Farm Bill, which was enacted in 2018, is due to expire in 2023. It includes a wide range of provisions in areas including disaster programs, export credit guarantee programs, infrastructure and technology development, and protective actions needed to minimize the risk of pathogens in the food and water supply. Regional interests play a key role in the bill, so organizations in the foodservice industry should know how their interests may be impacted in the upcoming bill. The Council for State Governments provides background on what's included, as well as links to additional resources.



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When waste reduction delivers big brand benefits

For restaurants, wasted food and packaging mean wasted money. But it's prudent to think beyond the financial. When restaurants can find inventive ways to reduce their waste, they benefit from not only cost savings but also elevated brand loyalty. Case in point: Taco Bell recently expanded upon its existing relationship with the recycling company TerraCycle. Through the partnership, Taco Bell customers can download a prepaid shipping label and send their used hot sauce packets – from any brand – to TerraCycle. The company then cleans and melts the packets down into hard plastics that are used to make new products. For Taco Bell alone, sauce packets amount to significant waste: The brand says it goes through about eight million packets annually and it now aims to make all of its consumer-facing packaging recyclable, compostable or reusable by 2025. Restaurant Business reports that when consumers send in their used packets, they can earn points that can be donated to a nonprofit, school or charity of their choice. Much like how a consumer buying an item from Amazon can direct a portion of proceeds from the purchase to their chosen charity, Taco Bell is making it easy for customers to give back – and to also feel good about buying a meal from Taco Bell. As you look for ways to reduce your waste – whether that includes excess food, takeout packaging or something else – how can you ensure your efforts have positive effects beyond your brand? Doing so may have an even more positive impact on your brand than it would have otherwise.



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