

# Foodservice Updates

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## How can you expand your day-part business?

*Consumers' perception of time has shifted with the pandemic.*

Yet another aspect of restaurant life that has shifted in recent months is the typical hour when people are consuming restaurant meals. As people have stayed closer to home – both during and after work – they have also altered the lunch and dinner rush. Even as lockdowns have eased, those changes may persist: A Datassential survey of 1000 consumers that was conducted in May found that 35 percent of respondents planned to avoid peak busy times at restaurants – even after lockdowns eased. But instead of seeing this as a negative, could there be advantages to spreading traffic out through the day and evening and not having a crowd for dinner on a Saturday night? Consumers' perception of time has shifted with the pandemic. Can your incentives capitalize on that? Getting your customers to come in for dinner on a Tuesday or a Wednesday night instead of a weekend may be easier to sell right now. Lunch may not need to fit squarely between certain hours when people are working from home. More people may be open to picking up an extra-early dinner. Case in point: QSR reported recently that Dunkin' had significantly grown its year-over-year sales between the hours of 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. as a result of offers to “entice guests to join, reactivate, and use DD Perks to make their transactions.” In other words, the brand effectively enticed customers to come in during once-slow periods. How can you harness your rewards program and marketing efforts to drive traffic at odd hours? If you have a lot of customers who are socially distancing now, you may be giving them just the incentive they need to support you.

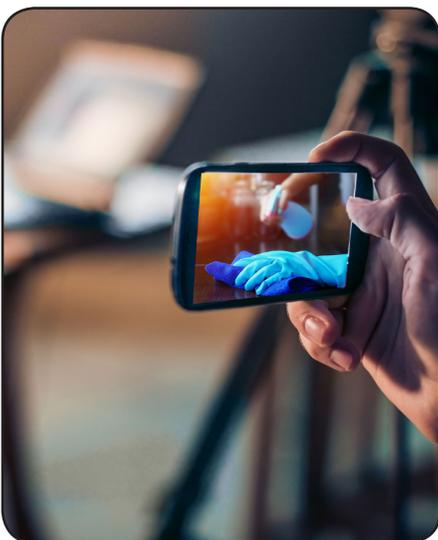


## Test your guests' appetite for protein alternatives

Just about every week, there is news about a new animal protein that has a vegetable-based or lab-grown substitute that makes a compelling case for replacing the real thing. New and up-and-coming options ranging from plant-based shrimp to lab-grown pork belly and bacon are on offer – and this comes at a time when animal protein continues to be hit by COVID-19 outbreaks in processing facilities and resulting supply chain delays. Granted, consumers still crave animal protein: A report from CB Insights says 30 percent of the calories people consume globally come from meat products. However, the pandemic may be accelerating the plant-based trend, along with an enhanced desire among consumers to choose foods that are environmentally sustainable. (The report said sales of vegan meat soared 264 percent in the nine weeks ending on May 2.) But how much are your guests willing to adjust their eating habits to help climate change? Will a lab-grown alternative really suit someone craving a bacon cheeseburger? A Nielsen report from last year found that only 12 percent of respondents said they would be willing to eat cultured meat in order to reduce their impact on climate change, while 61 percent said they would be amenable to reducing their meat consumption, 43 percent would eat more plant-based proteins, 22 percent would consider vegetarianism or veganism, and 8 percent would consider insect alternatives. But as more animal protein alternatives appear on grocery store shelves, consumers may become more willing to try new options. As a report from the Rail noted, introducing plant-based alternatives on your menu can be a way of gauging your diners' interest in more daring alternatives: "A guest eating an Impossible Burger now is likely to at least have an interest in a lab-grown burger in the future."



## Sanitize for the camera



Consumers are monitoring your adherence to new safety precautions. Increasingly, so are cameras. Last year, Domino's launched a back-of-house camera system called Dragontail to help assess basic quality control measures, like whether pizzas were the proper shape. But as Spoon reports, Dragontail is now launching an AI-powered camera that can also help monitor kitchen safety – detecting whether gloves and masks are being worn and how often a workspace is sanitized, for example. Expect more of this to come as restaurants embrace technology and face increased scrutiny of their health and safety practices.

## Apply new rules to allergy risks

At a time when your kitchen staff is making the extra effort to protect guests and themselves from coronavirus infection, it can be easy to overlook other critical safety precautions. For example, as you revamp menus and adjust your service model to accommodate supply chain challenges and social distancing, keep allergens in mind. Identify major allergens on your menus and communicate any substitutions you are currently using in longstanding dishes. Ensure that any digital platforms you're using to process orders allow customers to alert you to their allergies as easily as they did previously.



## Plan ahead to manage new stresses

In all likelihood, COVID-19 has made both your customers and employees more anxious about safety – and your customers may not fully appreciate all of the measures you and your staff have always taken to protect their health. A report from Modern Restaurant Management about the unforeseen challenges of the pandemic advises having a plan for managing both staff and customer responses to new stresses. Ensure your employees are clear on your new procedures and have been trained on how to respond to the range of new concerns they may hear from customers. Empower them to politely set boundaries with guests who demand precautions beyond the requirements of regulatory authorities. Make your expectations clear to your team about not only your service but their own health – they should know they should not ever risk coming to work while showing symptoms of illness.



# Pass the polenta

If you're looking for a pantry workhorse to complement sweet or savory dishes,



try polenta. It's rare to find an ingredient so versatile – it can work in every section of your menu and stand in for everything from oats to rice to pasta. Try it with a berry compote at breakfast, fry it and serve with marinara, bake it into crisp croutons on salad or include it as a creamy accompaniment to pork and poultry. Or for guests who aren't gluten-free, offer lemon polenta cake or cookies for a simple, rustic dessert.

## A more perceptive, profitable menu

Still using paper menus? In an environment where AI-powered digital menus can upsell, cross-sell and suggest dishes based on a customer's past orders or even the weather, the paper menu is likely to become an increasing liability. According to McKinsey research, personalization can deliver five to eight times the return on investment on marketing and can increase sales by 10 percent

or more. What's more, having a data-driven understanding of what customers are ordering will help you better predict what they are likely to order in the future – and help you minimize waste and the expense it generates.



## PORK BELLY WITH CREAMY POLENTA

### Ingredients:

- PORK, LOIN BONELESS SOUS VIDE FC
- APPLEWOOD - BLACK OAK - 4/4 LB
- BLACK OAK
- 2 cups dry red wine, such as Chianti
- 1 large red onion chopped
- 3-4 cloves garlic peeled and crushed
- 4 fresh rosemary sprigs
- 4 fresh thyme sprigs
- 2 bay leaves
- 1 tablespoon whole fennel seeds crushed
- 1 teaspoon red pepper flakes
- 3 - 3½ pound pork shoulder, trimmed and cut into 2 or 3 large pieces
- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- Sea salt and black pepper, to taste
- 1 14.5-ounce can Italian plum tomatoes, diced and undrained
- 1 - 2 cups chicken broth, preferably organic
- Fresh parsley, chopped (optional)



### Instructions:

- To a large glass or non-reactive bowl, combine: wine, red onion, garlic, rosemary, thyme, bay leaves, crushed fennel seeds, and red pepper flakes. Stir to combine all ingredients.
- Add pork shoulder chunks to the bowl and turn the pork until each piece is covered. Then cover the bowl and place it in the refrigerator to marinate for at least 8 hours, turn pork occasionally.
- After 8 hours, remove the bowl from the refrigerator and remove the pork from the marinade. Pat pork pieces dry with paper towels and set aside.
- Separate the marinade liquid from the solids. Keep both liquids and solids but discard the woody herb stems and bay leaves. Set aside.
- In a large heavy-duty skillet or Dutch oven, heat olive oil over medium-high heat. Add pork and sear evenly on all sides until it is evenly browned. (This will take about 8-10 minutes.) Season to taste with salt and pepper.
- Add the marinade solids and cook them until the onions are translucent and soft (about 10-12 minutes). Stir frequently.
- Add the marinade liquids to the skillet and deglaze the pan by scraping the brown bits from the bottom. Continue to cook until the liquid has reduced to approximately one third of the original volume.
- Add 1 cup chicken broth and tomatoes. Stir to combine. Cover and then reduce the heat to medium-low. Cook for 2 to 2 ½ hours and stir about every half hour. If needed, add more chicken broth while cooking.
- When the pork has reached the point that it can be easily pulled apart with a fork, remove it from the heat. Let it rest in the warm juices for about 10-15 minutes. Serve immediately. Can be served over a bed of creamy polenta and garnished with chopped fresh parsley.

Recipe and photo courtesy of Tyson

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