



# The NEW rules of restaurant equipment and supplies: A buyer's guide

How successful restaurateurs are outfitting their kitchens – and how you can too.

## Before you buy, read this.

As menu trends evolve, your restaurant operation follows. In fact, operators anticipate boosting their foodservice equipment and supplies budgets this year, according to the 2016 *Commercial Foodservice Market Forecast Report* by the Manufacturers' Agents Association for the Foodservice Industry (MAFSI). The pressure of choosing the right products – to delight diners and boost your bottom line – can be intense.

When it comes to an upgrade, remodel or new location, it's important to remember the NEW rules of restaurant equipment and supplies – in every category.

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**Happy shopping!**

# Chapter 1: Food preparation equipment

*Blend, slice, dice, chop, mix and knead*

## Rule 1: More is more.

Are the time and resources spent on your operation's food prep on the rise? It could be a sign of the times. Today's health-conscious, gourmet-minded consumers expect more and more menu items to be fresh and "homemade." Even QSRs are touting in-house preparation – from breakfast sandwiches to make-your-own tacos. Operators are differentiating themselves and impressing diners with house-made sauces, condiments and customizable options.

Consumer inclination toward freshness, authenticity and personalization all mean more prep work – and perhaps more prep equipment. When it comes to food prep equipment purchases, here are some tips to help you work smarter – not harder:

- **First, take a long, hard look at your menu.** Chances are, you know what types of food prep equipment you'll need based on your menu. But do you have a good handle on utilization/ demand on those items? If you have six different types of house-made salsas that fly off your taco assembly line faster than you can say "pico de gallo," you might need to purchase multiple blenders or food processors. What's more, how many people will be prepping at a given time? Be sure you're covered in terms of quantity and prep space.
- **Consider food allergies.** According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), food allergies among children, for example, jumped about 50 percent between 1997 and 2011. Even consumers without life-threatening allergies expect individualized prep. If your operation deals in dough, you might see the need to buy two sets of prep equipment – one dedicated solely to gluten-free customers. Blender manufacturers also are beginning to offer color-coded bowls to immediately telegraph which pieces are meant to accommodate common allergens – or which should be allergen free.
- **Stay sharp.** When it comes to slicing, dicing and blending, look for multipurpose equipment and don't skimp on quality. The best food processors and blenders, for example, are those precise enough to make coarsely chopped salsas without compromising yield, but powerful enough to blend and puree. In general, the higher the RPM, the less precise the cut, so consider the speed settings and your application before you buy.
- **Prep more, work less.** Some equipment – such as a vegetable washer that eliminates manual work – can pay for itself in labor savings.

# Chapter 1: Food preparation equipment

*Blend, slice, dice, chop, mix and knead*

## Rule 2: Open up.

There's no doubt about it – the open kitchen approach is hot, and seemingly here to stay. Assembly-line style ordering is another trend that not only calls for aesthetically pleasing ingredients, but good-looking prep equipment.

But even in open kitchen concepts, not every prep task should be visible. Put the prep equipment you use for the more appealing tasks front and center. For example, wash and peel the vegetables out of sight, then let chefs show off fancy knife work in open view of customers. The same goes for the ingredients themselves – keep those that are less appealing (raw meats for example) out of sight of customers.

When it comes to the equipment itself, look for designs that are sleek, modern and easy to keep clean.

## Rule 3: Aim for easy cleanup.

Kitchen cleanup is mission-critical in any equipment and supplies category, but there are special considerations when it comes to prep work. Consider the ease of cleanup when comparing products including blenders, food processors, slicers, juicers and cutting board surfaces. Look for equipment with easy to remove attachments and fewer crannies to navigate.



## Chapter 2: Primary cooking equipment

*Braise, broil, fry, grill, bake, boil and steam*

### Rule 1: Streamline and save.

The focus on efficiency in the restaurant business has never been higher. Rising operational costs, increased competition and fickle customers are the catalyst, and ever-improving technology is the remedy. Restaurateurs are answering the call with equipment that saves energy/water, time and space – and these days, the three usually go hand-in-hand.

Here are some tips to streamline kitchen operations with faster, more compact and more energy-efficient equipment:

- **Prioritize upgrades.** If you aren't starting from scratch, overhauling your whole kitchen at once is not only cost prohibitive, but also can be unnecessarily overwhelming. Focus first on replacing equipment types that are typically the biggest energy users, the slowest producers, or those that are space hogs: older broilers and ovens, for example, may be a good candidate for replacement.
- **Think about heat and ventilation.** Manufacturers are developing ever-more efficient gas broilers, which not only save in energy during operation, but also create less radiant heat and contribute to A/C savings. Meanwhile, smart ventilation systems use photoelectric smoke or heat detection to “decide” when and at what speed to run exhaust fans for big savings. These systems may not be right or necessary for every operation, but they're something to consider.
- **Rethink your recipes (or at least your cooking methods).** Bigger energy savings might require outside-the-box thinking. For example, switching to a cook-hold system for meats (versus cooking and then transferring to holding equipment) can cut energy use for that application in half. Induction technology, meanwhile, enables clean, compact and eco-friendly cooking. When it comes to space savings and speed, combination equipment (combi-ovens being the most obvious example) can enable a laundry list of cooking tasks via a single piece of equipment. According to Y-Pulse, 30 percent of restaurants are implementing combination technologies.
- **Get smart.** The aforementioned smart ventilation system is one example in a larger trend. Equipment manufacturers are developing technologically advanced systems that are a boon for energy and time savings: cook-and-hold technologies that can be programmed to automatically switch to “hold” mode after cooking, and record cooking times for easier food safety documentation; and cutting-edge conveyor belt ovens that sense down time and lower the temperature and belt speed accordingly.

## Chapter 2: Primary cooking equipment

*Braise, broil, fry, grill, bake, boil and steam*

### **Rule 2: Labor-saving technology is king.**

The cost of labor is high on nearly every restaurant operator's list of concerns. And while robots in the kitchen aren't beyond the realm of possibility, other labor-saving equipment can help. Conveyor ovens are a perfect example of longstanding cooking equipment that can be used in new ways (instead of grilling for instance).

Modern equipment technologies are even enabling operators to combine service and cooking labor. Particularly in quick-service and limited-service applications, more compact, "cleaner" technologies (ventless fryers, induction cooking) mean that the order taker also can be preparing the food. This setup plays into the transparency that customers crave — letting them see the ingredients and food preparation process.

Speed is important, too – the faster the prep/cooking, the faster the throughput and lower the labor cost. High-speed ovens that use convection or microwave technology is one example of many – in fact, new technology and design is enabling increased speed across a variety of products.

Finally, equipment that takes the guesswork out of production can reduce labor-related headaches. Many high-speed ovens, for example, have set cook times that automatically switch the oven off when the food is cooked – a pre-made breakfast sandwich for instance – so restaurants achieve better consistency and quality.

### **Rule 3: Follow the flavor.**

Consumer demand for more variety in terms of flavor and preparation continues to rise. According to NAFEM's 2014 State of the Industry Report, 52 percent of consumers say they like spicy foods, and the smoky flavor trend is gaining ground. Meanwhile, Asian concepts have seen the biggest recent growth, and that's just the beginning – diners are getting more and more adventurous and discerning when it comes to their food. In fact, no restaurant or geographic location is immune to the trend.

To keep up, a good mix of primary cooking equipment is important. Mix traditional staples (broilers, grills, fryers, etc.) with specialty equipment that allows for more authentic ethnic cooking. Vertical spits, smokers, woks and tortilla presses are examples of tools that not only enable you to keep in line with flavor/cuisine trends, they excite and delight when in view of the customer.

# Chapter 3: Refrigeration and ice machines

## Chill and freeze

### Rule 1: Fresh is best.

Consumer preference for freshness – whether real or perceived – is prevalent. And in recent years, several restaurants have capitalized on this in their marketing efforts. For some, walking the walk might mean the need for more cooler space. Still, freezers are a necessary element of many kitchens – and that’s where a combination walk-in might come in handy. For the right applications, these units offer both functions in one package.

### Rule 2: Up your ice game.

Ice is a small detail that can have a big impact on customers – particularly in light of the craft cocktail trend. Bartenders rely on different types of ice for different cocktails – from soft “chewable” pellets to, in recent years, larger, clear ice cubes that slow down melting and boost aesthetic appeal. Ice maker manufacturers are catching up to the latter, removing the manual work previously required to make large, crystal-clear cubes. From smaller, bar-side ice machines to larger models, expect to see more technologies that help restaurateurs up the ante.

### Rule 3: Get good at grab-and-go.

Grab-and-go is hot – in every foodservice segment. With an annual growth rate of 10.4 percent between 2006 and 2014, according to Technomic, it’s one of the foodservice industry’s highest performing segments. And restaurateurs would be wise to find ways to incorporate it into their operations. Keep pre-made food fresh and appealing with refrigerated displays that enable attractive presentation (but won’t kill you on energy costs). Operators who choose open-front, easy-to-access, grab-and-go display units may boost sales by as much 50 percent, according to *Foodservice Equipment & Supplies*.

Be sure to keep space in mind when making purchase decisions – refrigeration equipment suited for grab-and-go has to be properly located (not too close to windows and doors, away from heat sources, breathing room around the condenser, etc.) to work efficiently.

# Chapter 4: Serving equipment

*Dispense, carve, brew and warm*

## **Rule 1: Bring on the beverage options.**

From wine on tap and technology-enabled draft beer systems, to gourmet coffee and artisan soda, operators everywhere are upping their beverage game – and seeing big profits. But sometimes, along with these higher-maintenance drinks comes the need for specialty equipment. To maintain the integrity of pricier craft beers, for example, there are beverage dispensers that maintain and dispense drinks at just the right temperature – around 36 degrees for storage and 38 to 40 degrees when pouring.

When it comes to coffee, the bar also is getting higher. Consistent quality is key, so look for brewing equipment with intelligent features that help control temperatures. Water filtration is necessary to maintain the taste of high-end coffee and espresso beverages. Fortunately for operators, these technological advancements require less skilled labor and eliminate some of the human error that could be a concern in gourmet coffee-making.

## **Rule 2: The buffet is back.**

Buffets are ever popular with consumers – thanks to quantity aspect of course, but also the ability to pick and choose from a wide variety of items. But long gone are the days that a drab salad bar or ho-hum mashed potatoes and gravy make the cut. Operators are exciting diners with a whole new kind of buffet experience – one that’s not only aesthetically appealing but that also holds food quality as highly as quantity.

Looks are as important as efficiency, and many of today’s modern buffet tables fit the bill – no customized design necessary. For example, some buffet tables use technology that warms the food from the bottom via heat pads or induction technology.





# Chapter 5: Smallwares, cookware and kitchen tools

*Supply, outfit, stock and serve*

## Rule 1: Know your quantity.

The basic rules of cookware and smallwares haven't changed in a while – aluminum is still great for conducting heat; cast iron is still durable and naturally non-stick; stainless is still low maintenance and easy to clean. But when it comes to menu changes, expansions or new location openings, it might not be the types of smallwares that are stumping you, but the necessary quantity. Purchasing smallwares, cookware and kitchen tools can be overwhelming. While the possible concept types and sizes are limitless, there are some general rules for common applications. Click the links below to download our basic guidelines:

- Bakery
- 200-seat buffet
- 200-seat cafeteria
- 75-seat deli
- Fast food restaurant
- 60- to 80-seat fine dining restaurant
- 75-seat pizza restaurant
- 100-seat restaurant

## Rule 2: Little updates can make a big difference.

Quantities and types of smallwares are important when specifying, but are you also thinking about the hidden opportunities? One anecdote we've heard involves a simple pan switch in a buffet line – from a large buffet pan to individual servings – that saved millions in food costs. Another example – cast iron that doubles as servingware. Not only is it on-trend and visually appealing, it eliminates the need to use and wash two separate items.



# Chapter 6: Storage and handling equipment

*Hold, tote, cart, transport and display*

## **Rule 1: Rethink holding.**

Remove the taboo of hot holding. With new technologies and features, hot holding equipment can help operators save time, labor and money, and maintain consistency without any degradation to the quality or taste of the food. Pulse heat technology, which uses low intensity heat at a high volume, makes it easy to hold food for longer periods without drying it out. Humidifying technology is another option for some foods that need to stay moist. When shopping, have a ballpark holding time in mind – the amount of time you’ll need to hold a dish could dictate the level/type of technology you’ll need. Food types also call for varied holding technologies.

These improved technologies obviously are a boon to catering operations, which, according to Technomic, increased 20 percent between 2012 and 2015.

Heated and cooled food wells/prep tables are another consideration. With the increase in Chipotle-style assembly line concepts, operators must find ways to efficiently keep food, hot or cold, in a very visible way. This means storage and handling that offers the flexibility for hot and cold and aesthetic appeal.

## **Rule 2: Farm-to-table storage .**

The trend toward fresher ingredients may require a slight shift in storage equipment. Experts recommend clear storage bins, for example, particularly for more perishable produce and grains. This allows for easier visibility to monitor freshness. Storing the produce in the boxes straight off the delivery truck is a no-no; clean things immediately and transfer them to sanitary storage. Specialty storage bins – such as those with drainage to wick away moisture from fruits and veggies – also are available. Take stock of your ingredients and look for storage best suited to maintain their integrity and freshness.



# Chapter 7: Tabletop and servingware

## *Set and serve*



### **Rule 1: A place for everything and everything in its place.**

From cocktails to small plates, it seems that every dish these days needs dedicated servingware. But with proper planning, you can delight customers without driving yourself crazy. Find ways to repurpose uniquely sized or shaped serving dishes for multiple menu items, or dedicated glassware for cocktail menu items, for example.

Be cognizant of the fact that today's customers expect authenticity: Moscow Mules in copper mugs, hot tapas in colorful ceramic vessels and snifters for Belgian craft beers; so don't skimp when it comes to stocking. On the flip side, don't force things. If a specific tabletop or servingware item doesn't fit with your operation (too high maintenance, doesn't suit the concept, etc.), rethink things.

Finally, small plates and serving vessels don't seem to be going anywhere, so consider that when planning your dishes and supplies purchases.

### **Rule 2: Make it local, sustainable and special.**

From rustic pottery and handcrafted cutlery to specialty utensils made from recycled materials, there's a common thread here: Diners want a special experience that reaches beyond the food, in which they feel the operator truly cares for every detail. Whether that translates to sustainability, local craftsmanship or simply on-trend aesthetics, these small details make the difference. Today's tabletop and servingware manufacturers offer more choice than ever, so talk to them about your vision.

Warm, inviting and (seemingly) effortless presentation also is something to aim for. Think individually sized roasting pans and cast-iron bakeware, multi-patterned tableware and eclectic, matte silverware styles.

### **Rule 3: Rethink reusable.**

For operations that have a choice between disposable and reusable servingware, the decision often comes down to long-term costs, and several variables factor in. But while disposable servingware may seem like the easier option, reusables can save money, and the planet, in the long run. While operators must factor in the upfront cost of warewashing equipment, reusables often offer long-term savings. Those that need disposables for takeout/delivery orders may still want to consider reusable cutlery for eat-in orders.

# Chapter 8: Warewashing, janitorial and safety equipment

*Clean, disinfect and protect*

## Rule 1: Watch your water.

The EPA asserts that hospitality and foodservice operations make up 15 percent of the total commercial and institutional water use in the United States – the majority of that coming from the kitchen. In fact, by 2019, all prerinse spray valves must allow a max of 1.28 gallons of water per minute, down from 1.6. The aforementioned valve change may save an estimated \$500 over the life of the part, according to *Foodservice Equipment & Supplies*.

When shopping for dishwashers, new features include dual rinse zones and heat recovery systems that save water and energy. To combat steam and heat, look for heat-recovery systems in new warewashing technologies. Finally, automated (programmable) machines can help save time and labor.

## Rule 2: Vent smart.

Several equipment types allow you to eliminate or reduce ventilation, but what about the ventilation itself? And the whole HVAC system, for that matter? Smart ventilation systems can decide when and at what speed to run exhaust fans, saving significant amounts of energy.

Another way to save money on ventilation is to streamline cooking operations/techniques. Multipurpose equipment, such as a combi-oven, can reduce the amount of linear hood you'll need – saving in equipment and energy costs. Finally, don't let all that heat generated in the kitchen go to waste in the winter time: heat recovery systems recycle it for use in other areas of the building, reducing heating cost significantly.



# Chapter 9: Furnishings and décor

*Decorate and delight*



## **Rule 1: Get outdoors.**

Alfresco dining is hugely popular – so your outdoor space needs as much love as the interior, whether it's a full-service patio or simply additional outdoor seating. In addition to aesthetically pleasing, comfortable outdoor furniture, consider additional elements that address form and function: unique host stands and server stations, bars that complement the scenery and screens or room dividers that hide bussing stations or other unsightly elements. Operators can even mix landscaping with food prep, for example, making an operation's herb garden a part of the outdoor ambience.

Even if you don't have outdoor dining space, curb appeal is a powerful thing. Don't hide a lively and well-dressed interior space with curtains or blinds; large, open windows draw people in. When it comes to lighting (indoors and out), make sure it allows easy visibility from the street into the dining area.

## **Rule 2: Depart from the formal.**

White tablecloths and impeccably polished silverware have a time and place. But in recent years, reclaimed wood, industrial elements (iron, brick, concrete) and a homier vibe took over. Progressive designers are now finding a happy middle ground. Beyond the actual design trends themselves, consumers crave dining experiences that transcend but also seem homey and familiar: a bare farmhouse table and rustic servingware under a one-of-a-kind, eye catching chandelier, for example. One thing to keep in mind – if you go the reclaimed wood route for a bar top, for instance, make sure it's up to health department standards.

The demand for authenticity translates to design, too. Consumers, millennials in particular, appreciate foodservice design that is a nod to the local culture, people and history. In this vein, quality matters. Choose solid, quality décor that looks great and will stand the test of time, even if it means spending more upfront.



## There's more where that came from.

If you're overwhelmed with equipment and supplies purchasing decisions, or simply want to see everything that's out there in one convenient trip, make time for The NAFEM Show, Feb. 9-11, 2017, in Orlando, Fla. It's the one place where you'll have access to all of the leading restaurant equipment and supplies manufacturers.

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### About The NAFEM Show

*The NAFEM Show is a biennial experience brought to you by the North American Association of Food Equipment Manufacturers (NAFEM), a trade association of 550+ foodservice equipment and supplies manufacturers providing products for food preparation, cooking, storage and table service.*