



# Labor Pains? Right-Size Your Menu

Managing your core menu takes a bite out of all your kitchen costs.

Right-sizing your restaurant menu is all about cost control. Slower sales, expensive labor and rising costs call for shaving expenses. The menu and kitchen are places to find savings.

Make menu decisions by asking questions about three parts of your business—the core menu, labor effectiveness and kitchen efficiency. Here's how it works:

## 1. Monitor the menu

***Keep the stars, drop the dogs and puzzles ... figuring out my core menu is painful. Can I make it easy and still reduce labor?***

- Determine your menu basics (burgers, tacos, breakfast, ice cream, etc.):
  - Every menu item should help define your brand
  - Use market size or the competition to shape menu size
  - Add or change items with LTOs, specials, seasonal dishes

- Consider value-added products that reduce labor:
  - Precut, prewashed produce
  - Breaded, seasoned, heat-and-serve products
  - Shaped, sliced, high-quality, on-trend proteins
- Add to your ready-to-serve product lineup:
  - Dressings (salad dressings, condiments, etc.)
  - Sauces (salsa, pesto, etc.)
  - Dips (or any products that require manual effort)

## 2. Evaluate the labor

***My menu feels solid, but labor's still a struggle. Where do I go from here?***

- Your analysis should lay the groundwork for menu reduction:
  - Are there kitchen areas you could shut down?
  - Could you reset your menu to use only 3 kitchen stations?
- Watch where your staff spends time and evaluate format changes:
  - How much time is spent on prep work?
    - Would more ready-to-use items add hands-on cooking creativity?
  - How much time is spent with on-the-line cooking?
    - Could we do more meal prep to allow easy reheat and assembly?

## 3. Do a kitchen assessment

***My kitchen is plenty big and every station gets used. How do I decide what gets cut from my menu to reduce labor?***

- Think like a food truck, where space is small and few people do the work.
- Identify the kitchen stations you use.
- Compare menu items against kitchen stations:
  - Figure out which stations make each item to identify low-use stations
  - Evaluate if you can cut menu items using those stations
    - Does it free up one person from manning that area?
    - Does it reduce that person's steps?
    - Does it help produce other items in their station more efficiently?
- Reach conclusions about right-sizing the menu:
  - If chicken alfredo and mac & cheese are your only menu items using the sauté station, can they be removed to eliminate the sauté station and two prep items?
  - With sauté empty, could you use the flat top and create some new grilled items without adding steps or energy?

For more menu planning, product insights and a kitchen assessment worksheet, contact your Gordon Food Service Sales Representative.

Written by [Gordon Food Service Contributors](#)





# Short on Help? COVID-19 Healthcare Labor Strategies

Find foodservice solutions for your healthcare or senior living community.

The COVID-19 crisis brings unprecedented conditions for healthcare and senior living organizations. It's no easy task to adjust staffing needs right now. We asked foodservice operators and industry associations to offer ideas on managing workforce shortages while continuing to provide excellent food and service.

## Make menu & operational changes

**Reduce.** Consider cutting back your menu offerings to a restricted or non-select menu:

- Long-term care (LTC) locations can eliminate or reduce options from the “alternate choice” and “always available” menu
- Continue your room service and open menu concept, but transition to a non-select tray line approach serving meals at set times each day per unit if staffing becomes an issue

**Adjust.** Shift to convenience foods (heat and serve) vs. scratch:

- Visit our [Coronavirus Action Resources](#) page under "Resources" in Gordon Experience (login required) or ask your Gordon Food Service Sales Representative for access to a planned two-week convenience/temporary menu intended for crisis (low labor) situations
  - The menu follows the MyPlate meal pattern guidelines to comply with Centers for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS) regulation F-Tag 803
  - Diets available: Regular, Puréed and Mechanical Soft

**Cancel.** Eliminate or reduce catered events unless they are essential to your business

**Outsource.** Local organizations with licensed kitchens and experienced staff, such as restaurants, caterers and hotels may be able to cook for you:

- Provide standardized recipes to help their staff prepare the food
- Have them deliver the prepared food to your organization

## Recruiting and managing the help you need

Filling vacancies with qualified people is tricky in the best of times, so it pays to be resourceful with hiring and staffing:

- Reach out to area restaurants and hotels for potentially sharing their labor pool
- Hold video interviews with potential team members
- Onboard quickly with an abbreviated or online orientation
- Change to 12-hour shifts, fewer days per week
- Consider scheduling your team in specific groups to limit the employee contact. If someone tests positive for COVID-19, you limit worker exposure

Written by [Gordon Food Service Contributors](#)





## Train for Success: It Starts in Your Healthcare Kitchen

Pineapple Academy aims to upgrade your business by building a culinary culture.

Healthcare foodservice training is a challenge. Finding a way to commit to hours of education or scheduling people to cover shifts for those in class is disruptive. Plus, in-person trainers are expensive.

[Pineapple Academy](#), now available through Gordon Food Service, provides training solutions for senior living foodservice operators with an approach that is geared toward today's culture of online learning.

Using brief videos, Pineapple Academy's program combines hospitality and education to teach regulations, safety, culinary skills and more. The result is better [employee engagement](#) that leads to improved performance, morale and guest satisfaction. Pineapple Academy co-founder Greg Gorgone explains:

**What are the advantages of your training model?**

I spent years traveling the country doing in-person training, and I discovered the problems in healthcare foodservice to be similar across all my clients. Then came the realization that there are not enough instructors available to provide the training necessary for this industry. In-person training is costly and there's a lack of standardization. Having an online academy that can train a whole team in a consistent, efficient manner was the answer.

**Why choose online video training?**

We chose the route of online video training because there are not enough in-person trainers available. We decided to create a simple and scalable solution so we could share best practices from some of the best operators and instructors in the industry.

**What do you get when you sign up?**

We have a variety of subscription plans to meet everyone's budget. With each plan you get full access to our training, resource library, and student progress reports. We even have plans that offer the ability to do competency checks so that students can become Pineapple Academy certified. Our curriculum covers all the training needs of healthcare foodservice, including CMS (Centers for Medicaid and Medicare) rules and regulations, Customer Service, Basic and Advanced Culinary and much more. As we add courses, your training opportunities continue to grow.

**What's in it for the students?**

We want to build people's careers in this business. I started as a pot washer over 35 years ago. Because someone took the time to train and mentor me and got me interested in developing myself, I decided to go to culinary school, and my career took off from there. We have developed a similar approach to helping our students on their career path, possibly even toward becoming a chef or certified dietary manager.

**How does the business benefit?**

When you're feeding people who are vulnerable, meals must be perfect, from sanitation to nutrition. Training provides assurances and consistency. It also builds a culinary culture. When people are engaged, you have more job satisfaction, better hospitality and [less turnover](#). The financial impact in the turnover of just one hourly worker can cost operators between \$5,000 to \$10,000, so the return on investment in quality training is tremendous.

*Written by [Gordon Food Service Contributors](#)*





## Success story: Keeping staff takes a labor of love

Garden Griddle tames turnover with strategies that reduce staff stress.

The breakfast rush is on, and a restaurant line cook is upset because her child missed the school bus and needs a ride. In today's short-staffed labor environment, if she takes off you go from "in the weeds" to "in the swamp." What do you do?

If you're the owner of [The Garden Griddle](#) in Paw Paw, Michigan, the answer is: "We've got this. Take care of what's important."

Treating everyone like family is part of the secret to [retaining labor](#) at the 40-seat restaurant, catering company and bakery/sweet shop. President and owner Sarah Cox wouldn't have it any other way. It's an approach that means labor stability for the dozen or so staff members, including seven full-time employees.

"We treat each other like family," Cox said. "There isn't anybody on our team who wouldn't do anything to help the success of the business."

The family approach comes naturally. Cox's husband, Zach, manages the restaurant, while her mom, Janice Kimble, oversees the catering and bakery/sweet shop. She also gets help from her son, Cooper.

## Family-first approach

Since reopening after a pandemic lockdown in 2020, Garden Griddle has lost just one mission-critical employee—a kitchen manager who moved away. It's a remarkable accomplishment in an industry enduring record turnover and relentless labor shortages.

The family-first approach helps, but Cox acknowledges other factors as well. Among them are steady hours, a regular schedule, competitive wages and growth opportunities.

Garden Griddle is open five days a week, Wednesday through Sunday, from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. While it was tough to surrender revenue from Monday and Tuesday, this schedule proved popular for everyone.

"We have a regular, full-time schedule for most of our staff, and we don't need lots of extra part-time people, which is something we struggled with managing in the past," Cox said. "We'll probably never be open on Monday and Tuesday again, the profit to grief ratio isn't worth it."

## Steady schedules pay dividends

The regular schedule allowed Cox to budget a 40-hour work week in which some staffers are salaried. The regulars earn \$13 an hour, plus tip-sharing. Everyone qualifies because there's no division of labor. From server to line cook to dishwasher, each staffer fills whatever roles are needed.

It's a pay scale that allows Garden Griddle to compete with businesses offering \$15 an hour. To give everyone a raise, Cox says she called on her Gordon Food Service Sales Representative to figure out meal costing and raise menu prices.

"In the end, we've shaken out with the best team we've ever had," Cox said. "They can all ring up a sale, everybody can answer the phone, everybody can run food. My waitress goes in the back and assists on the line. My line people come help out front. There is no back-of-house vs. front-of-house mentality. We work for the customer."

## Creating career opportunities

[Staff loyalty](#) means employees treat Garden Griddle like a career. And why not? There are a growth opportunities in a business that started out 11 years ago as Creative Catering Services, a

mother-daughter catering company.

"The restaurant didn't come about until we lost our catering kitchen," Cox explained. "The only kitchen that was available was in a restaurant setting."

The reluctant restaurateur hatched the idea of a breakfast and lunch restaurant using the 14-seat space that came with the kitchen. Never mind that neither she nor her mom liked breakfast food or had ever run a restaurant.

Some menu and order planning help from Gordon Food Service started them in the right direction. They've been at it since, moving to the current Garden Griddle location in Paw Paw a few years later when the original building was sold.

### Expensive hobby to growth mode

Sometimes the restaurant felt like a very expensive hobby, Cox admitted. A weekend of catering could bring in four times the revenue of a Saturday at the restaurant. It also was stressful to run a catering operation out of the restaurant kitchen.

Then the pandemic took its toll on gatherings and the catering business. Today, the catering and restaurant business is a 50-50 split.

The real saving grace was the loyal employees. When the restaurant came back online, everyone on staff pitched in, making takeout lunches and dinners and even turning 500 pounds of chocolate into cocoa bombs, a pandemic hot chocolate Instagram favorite.

It led Cox and Kimble to open a separate catering kitchen across the street. Plans for the accompanying storefront include a bakery and confection shop called "g.g. sweets" (Garden Griddle Sweets) that will feature ... you guessed it, cocoa bombs.

"I asked my people why they stay here, and they all said the same thing: Because we care about them," Cox said. "And they work hard for us, like family."



Written by [Gordon Food Service Contributors](#)

# Staffing Strategies for COVID-19

Best Practices for Labor Shortage and Employee Satisfaction for Foodservice Operations in Healthcare and Senior Living Settings



The COVID-19 crisis brings unprecedented conditions for healthcare and senior living organizations. The situation is heightened by industry workforce shortages prior to the pandemic. This resource summarizes strategies to help foodservice leaders adjust operations and provide excellent food and services despite significant labor shortages. It also offers ideas to improve employee satisfaction and morale.

## Labor Shortage Strategies

### Menu & Operational Strategies

- ▶ Consider reducing menu offerings to a restricted or non-select menu:
  - Long-term care (LTC) locations can eliminate or reduce options from the “alternate choice” and “always available” menu
  - Continue your room service and open menu concept, but transition to a non-select tray line approach serving meals at set times each day per unit if staffing becomes an issue
- ▶ Adjust menu items to convenience foods (canned, frozen, pre-cooked) vs. scratch:
  - Visit our Coronavirus Action Resources page under “Resources” in Gordon Experience® (login required) or ask your Gordon Food Service® Sales Representative for access to a planned two-week convenience/temporary menu intended for use during crisis (low labor) situations
    - > The menu follows the MyPlate meal pattern guidelines to comply with Centers for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS) regulation F-Tag 803
    - > Diets available: Regular, Puréed and Mechanical Soft

- ▶ Do not switch to disposable dishware to save on dishroom labor unless absolutely necessary per infection control policy
- ▶ Cancel or reduce catered events unless they are essential to the business
- ▶ Outsource some of your foodservice needs to local organizations with licensed kitchens and experienced staff, such as restaurants, caterers and hotels:
  - Provide standardized recipes to help their staff prepare the food
  - Have them deliver the prepared food to your organization

### Recruiting and Hiring

- ▶ Reach out to area businesses such as restaurants and hotels for potentially sharing their labor pool
- ▶ Hold video interviews with potential team members
- ▶ Consider offering an abbreviated or online orientation to expedite onboarding
- ▶ Partner with your state or local restaurant association to help obtain potential employees

## Staffing and Scheduling Strategies

- ▶ All hands on deck! Post sign-up sheets for other non-nursing staff (administrative, housekeeping, activities, etc.) to help with meal service
- ▶ Collaborate with your HR department to redeploy workers in areas where there's demand
- ▶ If you are using staff or volunteers that are not experienced in foodservice, provide basic food safety and sanitation training:
  - Visit our food safety page (Gordon Experience login required) or ask your Gordon Food Service Sales Representative for food safety basics training resources
  - If direct-care staff have typical duties on hold, engage them in foodservice tasks such as delivering meals, snacks and restocking work areas or kitchen pantries. The American Health Care Association (AHCA) and the National Center for Assisted Living (NCAL) offer some tips on communal dining
- ▶ Change to 12-hour shifts, fewer days per week
- ▶ Consider scheduling your team in specific groups to limit the number of employees who come in contact with each other. If someone tests positive for COVID-19, you limit worker exposure



## Employee Satisfaction Strategies

### Staff Morale: Employee Rewards & Recognition

- ▶ Increase rounding with team members. Ask them about their family and friends ... show them you care
  - ▶ Hold daily team huddles to ensure consistent communication
  - ▶ Say "Please" and "Thank You" ... often
  - ▶ Increase recognition. Go from "Employee of the Month" to "Employee of the Week"
  - ▶ Implement an employee recognition bulletin board within the department
  - ▶ Provide a meal for employees when at work and free snacks in the break room
  - ▶ Have dress-down days
  - ▶ If possible, offer grocery or gas gift cards
  - ▶ Incentivize employees to remain in the building during breaks to decrease exposure
  - ▶ Save employees time and reduce unnecessary exposure by offering micro markets in your building for all employees:
    - Grab-and-go meals (see next page)
    - Groceries
    - Daily essentials such as hand soap, hand sanitizer, hand lotion, tissues, toilet paper and cleaning wipes
    - Offer care packages for staff with some essentials and snacks, as well as a note of gratitude
- Note: Ask your Gordon Food Service Sales Representative for ideas and product solutions for grab-and-go meals and individually wrapped snacks.



### Grab-and-Go Meals for Employees

- ▶ Develop a streamlined pre-order and pickup system for employees to use
- ▶ Offer cashless payment, such as payroll deduction. Require payment at time of order
- ▶ Develop a menu based on staff capacity and product availability:
  - Increase batch sizes from your standard menu offering so you have portions left to offer as grab-and-go portions
  - Offer Gordon Food Service Tastefully Balanced™ Meals
    - > Buy case quantities of individual pre-made products (such as pot roast and roasted potatoes)
    - > Use a provided portioning guide to portion them into individual servings
    - > Use a provided label template to print packaging labels
- Purchase pre-packaged individual meals to resell. If retail portion sizes are not available, consider buying in bulk and repackaging in individual or family-size portions. Follow food safety standards and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) labeling guidelines
- Use outsourced labor from local businesses (see Menu and Operational Challenges section on the first page) to prepare meal options
- Repackage case quantities of other items such as fresh produce and whole grains to add to the entrée offerings

**Ask your Gordon Food Service Sales Representative for ideas and product solutions for grab-and-go meals and online ordering resources.**

