

What's inside school foodservice pros' dream kitchen?

New survey reveals how today's trends are affecting decisions on which equipment makes the grade in the educational foodservice space.

Y-Pulse's 2017 Dream Kitchen Survey

takes a look at factors—both menu related and not—that influence the equipment wish list of K-12 and college foodservice professionals. Food trends include healthy, fresh food, grab-and-go options and keeping those with allergies safe. In addition, labor cost, space and versatility are real-world factors shaping the realities of equipment priorities.



Setting the stage: food trends at play

Buying decisions for the foodservice operation within a school district or a college system are influenced greatly by these trends, the survey discovered: Accommodating allergies, fresh/locally sourced focus, healthy food, sustainability and grab-and-go options.

Non-menu issues

Labor costs, budget constraints and staff training lead the list in factors that get major consideration during purchasing decisions. **“These non-menu issues indicate that kitchen equipment which is foolproof for staff and requires minimal training will be in greater demand,”** says **Sharon Olson, executive director of Y-Pulse.**

Grab-and-go, healthy food more than a fad

Of all the food trends affecting buying decisions, **grab-and-go and healthy trends could have the most staying power,** Olson speculates. “They’re no longer emerging trends, but rather a strong influence, which will shape the equipment industry in the next few years.”

Allergies at top of mind

Accommodating allergies stands out for 87 percent of K-12 foodservice operators as the most significant menu trend that will influence their equipment buying habits. And 85 percent college foodservice operators felt the same.

Ways to be local

Many foodservice management companies have been making pledges to increase the amount of locally sourced food purchased each year. So it makes sense that 80 percent of K-12 operators and 77 percent of college operators said the **emphasis on fresh/local ingredients,** now a standard part of foodservice, are an important part of equipment choices.

Healthy tops the list for K-12 operators

Offering **healthy options is the frame of reference for 97 percent** of K-12 operators in the survey. A non-menu facet of this trend—understanding how different cooking methods would affect the nutritional value of the food—matters to 60 percent of college operators and 57 percent of K-12 operators.

Labor cost affects everyone

The survey found that 92 percent of college foodservice operators said **labor cost is a major factor when making an equipment purchase,** and 82 percent of K-12 operators agreed.

Space race

Another non-food factor that emerged from the survey is space. Citing close quarters within which to work, 96 percent of college foodservice pros and 89 percent of K-12 operators said **space dictates the realities of their equipment purchasing.**

What should dream equipment be able to do?

Overall, the survey shows that foodservice professionals are looking for “**smarter, more efficient cooking equipment**...they are interested in equipment that is easy to train staff members and can multi-task.”

What's on the wish list?

When asked about their biggest equipment needs, K-12 foodservice pros said they really want **updated combi and convection ovens**, as well as dishwashers with better drying capability. In addition, there's a strong interest in **display kitchens** that allow students to see their meals being prepared and to connect with the people preparing the food. In the college market, directors are also looking for combi and convection ovens, along with wood-fire pizza ovens.

Flexibility is a big deal

Equipment that can be plugged in anywhere and can be repurposed for **pop-ups or special menus** was a must-have for college foodservice pros.

Opportunities emerge

The survey explored problem-solving opportunities to show manufacturers the path many of their customers are on. Some opportunities include **off-campus dining, food trucks, QSR-branded food offerings, lunch in the classroom and electronic ordering.**

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