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Foodservice equipment & supplies®

Dream Kitchen Survey Looks at Operator Use of Foodservice Equipment

The use of food preparation and storage equipment is on the rise, according to 35 percent of foodservice operators participating in the Dream Kitchen Survey, a joint research project from *Foodservice Equipment & Supplies Magazine* and Y-Pulse, a Chicago-based market research firm. The Dream Kitchen Survey features insight from foodservice operators about the impact of menu trends on their professional kitchens.

In addition, more than 30 percent of foodservice operators report more use of high-volume production, beverage service, combination cooking and merchandising equipment. The interest in beverage service equipment is due, in large part, to the success limited-service restaurants like coffee shops continue to enjoy and the growing popularity of craft beer and cocktails — all higher margin items for many operators.

Merchandising equipment plays a key role in supporting more grab-and-go service, which operators across the board continue to offer to help keep pace with customers' fast-paced lifestyles.

These changes in equipment use are due, in large part, to several evolving menu trends. Specifically, operators' desire to serve food that's considered healthy, fresh and includes locally sourced ingredients continue to have the

greatest impact on foodservice equipment selection, according to the Dream Kitchen Survey. Other trends also affecting foodservice equipment and supply selections include all day menus, snacking and accommodating allergies and special diets.

Among those trends, all day menus represent a trend worth watching. As restaurant industry growth remains steady but slow, many operators are looking to move into what would be considered nontraditional dayparts for them. For example some quick-serve chains that traditionally served lunch and dinner now offer breakfast. And some coffee concepts continue to explore adult beverages as a way to extend their appeal throughout the day. Adding different options like this provides the potential to grow sales without adding locations by using existing infrastructure or by making a small investment.

Among prominent menu trends, ethnic food and portability have the least influence on equipment choices according to respondents. Operators report cashing in on the flexible nature of certain types of equipment to help adapt to market conditions. This can include using one piece of equipment to cook multiple ethnic cuisines. For example, some operators report using a Mongolian grill to cook Asian menu items as well as Spanish paella and Mexican quesadillas.

In addition, operators seem to be embracing more flexible equipment items. When asked what one specific piece of equipment they wish they could

add, 37 percent of the operators chose a combi oven, far and away the most popular choice in this study.

What operators cite as their biggest challenges with foodservice equipment varies by segment. However, the overall top sources of frustration include breakdown/repairs; failure to meet expectations for quality, durability and/or performance and maintenance. Operators continue to see warranties as a critical aspect of the service component when purchasing foodservice equipment, the study shows. In fact, more than 80 percent of operators across all segments indicate warranties are important to them.

From a functional standpoint, operators' key challenges include having what they feel is an adequate amount of space to execute their menus and service, according to the Dream Kitchen Survey. Within that space operators cite their kitchen layouts and designs as being a major source of frustration. These concerns are becoming more amplified as many foodservice operators, in an attempt to increase revenues, keep expanding the front of the house at the expense of the back of the house. As a result, operators could start to place a greater emphasis on equipment items that perform multiple functions and feature smaller footprints.

The Dream Kitchen Survey also highlights the growing importance of staff training across all operator segments. Today's equipment often comes with significant promises of lowering utility

costs or even maximizing labor. For these promises to come to fruition, though, training is often necessary. And maintenance expectations are, in some respects, tied to training. That's because for a piece of equipment to properly function, the operator needs to maintain it.

51

The percent of consumers who say customization is highly important in creating good value, according to Technomic.

61

The percent of women who have worked in the restaurant industry, according to the National Restaurant Association.

74

The number of times the average American now eats at a restaurant per year, according to The NPD Group. This is the lowest level in 30 years.

11.2 Billion

The annual sales proprietary convenience store foodservice generates on an annual basis, according to Technomic. This accounts for 28 percent of the retail foodservice segment.