

## Recipes: 4 Reasons Why Your Operation Needs Them

### Menu Development & Engineering

A few years ago (or decades), a group of us cooks were on a break talking about the ins and outs of cooking. It was a great time in my career. We were all in our early 20s and ready to take on the world. When the topic of recipes came up, I proudly announced how I didn't believe in recipes as they stifled creativity.

Fast forward to now and I eat my words every time I think of that conversation. Let me try to dig my way out with a perspective. We were all pretty good cooks and if shown how to do something we would replicate it every time. So, why would we need recipes? What I failed to recognize is every time we were shown something we were being shown a recipe, just not in its written form.

Ask me about recipes today, and I will stand on my newfound soap box and proclaim that "they are the foundation for consistency and financial success", and I mean it. The problem is not everyone sees the value of them, which is most likely due to the amount of work involved in writing, testing, costing, and updating them.

This edition of CORE Profit Strategies will explore the top 4 reasons why your operation needs to have recipes to create a foundation for profit success.

#### 1) Consistency

There is no question that you don't need a fancy system or typed recipe to be consistent. You need to have the ingredients and amounts written down and procedures that match the skillset of your lowest skilled employee. However, most places don't even have that.

Let's look at the benefits.

Most cooks and chefs have their own opinions on how much of each ingredient should be used and how much "some garlic" is. The most important thing for a customer is consistency and it is important that the customer experiences the same taste every time they order that specific item. They really don't care about anyone's opinion on how much each ingredient should be. So, having a receipt that is specific about amounts ensures consistent food for your customers, regardless of who cooked the food.

The second aspect of consistency is on finished orders. This is where it comes down to portion control and the only way to have portion control is for everyone to know and use the same measurement and

tool for measuring. With that said, there is no question that over time someone can eye every portion and be close to 100%. That is what you should strive for because it will improve the speed of service. That only comes after repetition and until someone can demonstrate accuracy repeatedly in a controlled test they need to measure.

## 2) Measuring

Make it easy on your team by building recipes with common utensils. Do not use some obscure measuring device that no one can find. For larger volume production use the measurement that the product came in for the kitchen recipe. For example, 200 oz of canned tomatoes is 2 cans. Simplify where you can.

## 3) The Foundation for Financial Measurements

The most effective and only way that food cost is to be measured is by comparing the actual to theoretical (potential) food costs based on the recipes.

But why does it matter? Consider that the actual food cost is 27% and the potential food cost budget is 29%.

The 29% is not based on anything more than what people “think” the food cost should be. That could be based on experience, what other restaurants shoot for, or simply a guess.

In which case the 27% may seem great until someone comes along and implements the right processes to find out that your potential cost is 22%. That is the worst news that you can hear and usually is not well received by anyone.

The other benefit of recipes is what I refer to as a “company decision”. Chefs, you know this one. You need to have a 29% food cost, but you can’t raise prices when the cost of goods increases. Or you are told to lower the selling price or increase the portion or both.

Actual to potential costing takes that into consideration and if your actual cost is 30% and your theoretical is 29% you are good. There will always be a variance between the actual and potential costs, and a variance under 1.5% is generally acceptable.

Other benefits to actual vs potential:

You can see the ingredients that are out of line (actual usage is higher than potential). This can point to specific actions such as portion control, yield issues, waste, theft, or problems with the recipe.

Mobilizes the GM to talk to purchasing to find better prices if you are doing everything you can.

#### 4) Menu Engineering

Last, but certainly not least, is menu engineering. This is the most effective way to control and maximize your profits when everything else is in order. It is also a crucial piece of information when making changes to the menu. If your menu content decisions are based solely on sales, there are a couple of mistakes that can be made.

You could take off a diamond in the rough that has great profit margins but needs some help increasing the sales

Leave an item with high sales but low profit on the menu

Without recipes, menu engineering does not exist.

There is no question that recipes are important to your operation. They help maintain consistency for the customer and your staff, help determine actual vs potential food costs, and help you understand and engineer your menu to profit excellence. Without recipes your food quality can change, your staff may become confused and start making their own decisions, and food can be wasted. It may seem like a lot of work to determine recipes for every item on your menu but trust me when I say the return on investment is very much worth your time.

In the next edition of CORE Profit Strategies, we will start to look at the steps to building the perfect recipe.

Want to be the first to read it? Subscribe to [CORE Profit Strategies](#) to get weekly tips and strategies to your inbox on menu engineering, food cost, recipe creation, kitchen design, and more to help you increase profits and achieve excellence.