Going Round About Cycle Menus

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What is a cycle menu?

“A cycle menu is a set of menus that repeat. The goal should be to build a cycle that offers enough choice to maximize participation.”

-School Food and Nutrition Service Management

by Dorothy Pannell-Martin & Julie Boettger
How many weeks?

• Depends on how much variety you offer
• Depends on how many standard items you serve
• Depends on how you have to plan labor for meals (spread out the scratch days)
Benefits of Creating a Cycle

• Planning
• Labor
• Ordering
• Forecasting
• Compliance
• Participation
• Costs
Planning

Meals that take advance prep time are planned later in the week

- Thawing
- Precooking
- Batch Cooking

Other commitments can be accommodated

- Delivery Day
- Meeting Days
- Short Days

Equipment availability
When do I make Tacos?

- When is my delivery day?
- What is the thaw time for ground beef?
- Do I have refrigeration to give up for a week?
- How long will it take me to cook all the meat?
- What side dishes do I serve?
- Do I have enough time to prepare them the same day?
- Are kettles available for meat?
- How many batches must I do?
Labor

• Typically, labor is fixed and does not adjust
• Menu prep does fluctuate based upon items
• Prep time
  – Complexity
  – Side dishes
  – How is it served
• Service time
  – Popularity
  – Speed of Service
• Clean up time
Today: Corndogs/Fries
Tomorrow: Turkey & Gravy

• Which meals take more time?
• What prep can be done a day (or more) in advance?
• Can prep be done by another person in advance to balance labor, cupping fruit?
• Is there equipment available to use or do we have to wait for lunch to be done?
• How popular is the item?
• Can something be cooking during lunch service?
Ordering

• Items on order guide clearly identified
• Items are expected and compliant
• Orders can be checked to follow the cycle
• Consistency in orders
• Ordering matches usage
• Inventory is used up regularly
• Inventory is not lost in back of freezer or gone

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Forecasting

- Historic usage of products
- Products used with the same sides so more consistency
- Trends in usage
- Documentation of abnormalities so not considered
- Better able to prepare in batch or based upon actual numbers
- Use of all production data numbers
Heritage Day Lasagna

- Use of production record showed last three served amount: 350, 335, 325
- Trends in prepared showed decline, waste was increasing 5, 10, 15
- Today served with slushie trying to improve counts

Comments for abnormalities
- Grade 3 was celebrating Italian Heritage Day and inviting parents
- Served once on a Monday then on a Thursday
Compliance

• Meal Components are familiar
  – Combinations are expected
  – Meal items are associated

• Portions are consistent

• Planning reflects actual production which is where analysis is done

• Decreased chance of missed requirements
Pancakes & Sausage then Waffles & Ham

- Three pancakes vs only two waffles
- 2 Sausage links vs 1 sausage patty vs 1.5 oz ham
- Strawberries served on waffles but not pancakes
- Do we serve syrup?
Participation

- Students know what the product is
- Students require multiple exposures to show interest or try something new
- Can students count on the product being the same when they see that name on the menu
Cheese Zombie Sticks

- Do students know what this product is?
- How was participation the first time it was offered vs the last time?
- How much leftover was there?
- Did you change the side dishes? Sometimes with dipping sauce and some times without?
- Was it served with a slushie that was really driving the counts?
Cost

- Bid 80% of what you use
- Inventory is not excessive and quickly rotated
- Decrease in true loss
- Better monitoring of ordering, usage, waste
- Cost menu on actual not theoretical cost
- Planning for labor and food (90% of budget)
- Decrease waste
Mix it up Lunch Menu

New! New! New! New! Everyone loves it!

“Southwestern” Food is so popular

- Taco Snack
- Lettuce, cheese, tomato cup
- Salsa cup
- Spicy Tater Tots
- Grilled Veggies
- Applesauce
- Choice of Milk
Taco Snack Trouble

• Served with tater tots, cupped salsa and grilled vegetables and ran out of sheet pans
• OT the next day for chicken wraps since staff thought they had to make the taco meat and wraps
• Wrong item actually received but served anyway
• New item does not show contribution so did not serve enough meat component
• Made the max of 400 because kids love Mexican items
• Put back 1½ full cases that were panned since (luckily) not cooked
• Kids and parents did not know “taco snack”
• Sub took the ½ case remaining but could not tell
• Never put back on the menu so extra case ordered got freezer-burned
But…But…But…But

• Cycle menus SHOULD be adjusted over time
• Substitutions can be made for like production, participation, cost
• Commodity products can easily take the place of a purchased item or similar item
• Specials can be introduced and emphasized so everyone can prepare or market it to get the desired outcome
• New products can be tried in a true test scenario to compare, not in a random method
Software Can Help You Write a Menu

• Using menu planning software can provide you the ease of maintaining a cycle menu for any length of time
• Production Records manage forecasting, prepared and leftovers over time
• Ordering to ensure accuracy
• Assurance of compliancy
• Costing of planned, prepared and leftover

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And Help You Change It Easily

- Able to:
  - Change
  - Update
  - Substitute
  - Rearrange menu days
Questions?

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