Food Service Professional's Guide To Balanced Menus

Part III.
Getting Everyone On Board

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Thank you for your commitment to improving the lives of the people you serve. Like you, we understand the intimate connection between food and health, and we recognize that food environments heavily influence customers’ dietary choices. In an era of widespread diet-related disease, we believe that everyone deserves access to healthy food, no matter the circumstance. Moreover, we believe that the healthiest choices should be easy and convenient to make, which is only possible in a food environment that values, encourages, and supports a more balanced way of eating.

At Balanced, we understand the challenges of today’s modern food system, and like you, we’re determined to overcome them for the sake of improving public health. In providing food for large numbers of people every day, you and your team have an incredible opportunity to prevent and reverse the leading causes of disease, disability, and premature death in the United States. We know this is not an opportunity or responsibility you take lightly. This is why we're so grateful to collaborate with visionary leaders like you as we work together to change menus and save lives.
Promoting Balanced Menus & Training Your Team

Overhauling your entire menu overnight and not investing your team in changes is a recipe for disaster.

Unrealistic expectations set you and your team up for failure, but building consensus around the changes you’re making removes the pressure to overhaul everything all at once, and getting staff buy-in makes the entire process easier.

To set you up for success at this stage, we will help you (1) build and execute a promotional plan, including gathering testimonials and allies within the constituency, (2) respond to constituency feedback, and (3) complete any necessary staff trainings.
There is no one right way to roll out menu changes, and there is not an exact or scientific timeline either. You and your team probably have a lot of experience marketing and promoting the menus you've created, so we've designed the tools and resources on the following pages in the hopes of helping you build on the successes you've already had.

Menu Change Considerations

1. Think about your messaging

Making a big deal of change might not always pay off

Researchers at the London School of Economics found that by removing the labels "vegetarian", "vegan", or "meatless" from their menu items and integrating them into the regular menu, their sales increased by more than 55%.

Instead of talking about and/or labeling what your new dishes don't have, play up the exciting flavors and nutritional benefit of the dish.

Using words like balanced, enriched, flavorful, energy-boosting, fiber-rich, nutrient-dense, and other positively-associated phrases is a great way to start investing your team, customers, and other stakeholders in the menu changes from the very beginning. If you can help them see how the menu changes will improve some part of their life, you'll be on track to winning them over!

More on marketing menus changes in next section
2. Find an ally on your team

Change is always easier when you're not doing it alone. Chances are, someone on your team or in your community is on board with the very reasonable improvements you want to make to your menus. It likely won't be hard to find someone who agrees that improving the healthfulness of your menus is a good thing for everyone.

You probably already know who on your team you can count on to be excited about the changes. Tell them about your plans early and encourage them to share their excitement with the rest of the team. Building a positive consensus around menu changes will make the inevitable road-blocks easier to get around and when changes feel more like a team effort than a top-down mandate, they happen much more smoothly.

3. Gather Testimonials

Is one of your team members or customers really passionate about the changes you're making? Ask them to write up a few sentences why or to record a small video to share with others.

Interview a nutrition expert or food service professional whose opinion is credible and enthusiastic. Share the quotes as part of the lead-up to the new menus or early in the marketing campaign.

As the menu changes roll out, ask the people you serve to share a testimonial and post the quotes around your cafeteria or in a newsletter.

Build positive momentum around the changes by regularly updating the testimonials and make your customers feel important, heard, and celebrated.

"I can't wait for the new, healthier menu items!"
We’re leading the healthy-food revolution!

Here at [your location] we’ve always prided ourselves on the quality of our food and the care we take to ensure our [students, customers, colleagues] are fed delicious, healthy food. Well, now we’re taking it one step further by balancing our menus with even more health-promoting meal options.

We’ve been selected as one of the first in the country to take part in a program designed to boost the health of our [customers, etc..] by enhancing the healthfulness of our menus!

Over the course of the next few months, our team will swap one meal a week for a healthier alternative. Our focus will be on reducing the amount of cholesterol, saturated fat, and sodium on our menus while boosting the fiber, vitamins, and minerals—changes that are scientifically proven to fight against diet-related diseases like heart disease, hypertension, high cholesterol, obesity, stroke, and even some cancers.

Don’t worry, we’re not changing everything overnight! Our goal is to create sustainable, healthy menus that our customers love. Starting with just one meal each week is a great way to introduce new foods, and it will give us a chance to hear from our customers in real-time about what they do and don’t like so we can better serve them in the future.

What this means for our team...[share with your team the next steps or timeline for change]

The opportunity to enhance the healthfulness of our menus is so exciting and our team should feel proud to be leading this work!
ANSWERING YOUR STAKEHOLDERS' QUESTIONS

Anytime you make menu changes, you'll probably be met with a few questions. Especially if you engage in a marketing and/or promotional campaign. Having a prepared response or some place your customers can go to learn more will help ease any anxiety those you serve may be experiencing.

Q Why are changes being made to food service?

A (for schools) We are diversifying our menus by adding more healthy entrée options in place of health-harming ones, as well as providing additional beverages and sides. We want to create an atmosphere that promotes the health, wellness, and academic success of our students in making healthier choices as easy, convenient, and appetizing as possible.

Q What changes are being made to the menus?

A We are adding a number of plant-based options to the menu and reducing processed meats, red meats, and high-fat and -cholesterol foods that have been shown to harm health when eaten on a regular basis. In addition, we are adding healthier milks, healthier grains, and more produce and plant proteins generally as a means of diversifying options and improving consumer choice.
The World Health Organization has determined processed meats to be Group 1 carcinogens, meaning that the body of evidence supporting a causal link between processed meats and cancer is definitive. Other medical authorities, including the American Medical Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics, have called for the elimination of processed meats from hospital menus and from the diets of children and pregnant women. We want to ensure that nothing we serve is causing demonstrable harm.

Where can I read the evidence in support of these change?

We have resources on our website, as well as handouts, that provide links to the primary sources we used to determine our new nutrition standards. These resources will help explain the health benefits, academic and productivity benefits, and the cost savings associated with the innovative menu changes we have implemented. Another resource, with which we are unaffiliated, is the Nutrition Facts website, www.nutritionfacts.org.

How will this affect the price of lunch and breakfast?

(public schools) The changes we are making to the menu options will not affect the pricing of student meals. We project that operational costs will [decrease / stay the same].

Will these menus comply with federal nutrition mandates? (public schools)

The changes we are making to the menu are in full compliance with the USDA's nutrition mandates for public schools and will, in fact, meet a higher standard of healthfulness than those set by the USDA. Specifically, we are further reducing sodium, saturated fats, and processed meats while we increase the amount of legumes, vegetables, and 100% whole grains.
Staff Training

While Balanced is unable at this time to provide substantive hands-on training to kitchen staff, we will connect you with the resources your staff may need to successfully implement menu changes. On the following pages is a compilation of organizations that provide trainings and other resources.
HANDS-ON TRAINING

HSUS Forward Food
www.forwardfood.org

Chef Ann Foundation
www.chefannfoundation.org

Coalition for Healthy School Food
https://www.healthyschoolfood.org

Chef Annette - That Veggie Gurl
https://linktr.ee/thatveggiegurl

ONLINE COURSES

Rouxbe Online Culinary School

$$$

Plant-Based Cooking Course

Plant-Based Certification Course
https://rouxbe.com/plant-based-certification-course/

Udemy

$

Cook Real Food: How to Make Simple Plant-Based Meals
https://www.udemy.com/cook-real-food/

Healthy Families: Nutrition, Plant-based cooking, and more
https://www.udemy.com/healthy-families-nutrition-cooking/

Forks Over Knives

$$

Plant-Based Cooking With Confidence
https://www.forksoverknives.com/cooking-course

Coursera & Stanford

$$

Child Nutrition and Cooking
https://www.coursera.org/learn/childnutrition
Our nation's public health is in a crisis, and ultimately, **this crisis is linked to what we are eating on a day-to-day basis.** As a food service team that cares about every single one of our loyal customers we have a responsibility to provide tasty meals that also promote health, well-being, productivity, and longevity.

That's why, over the course of the next year, we will be making a number of innovative and industry-forward improvements to our food service in an effort to provide healthier entrees to everyone we serve. We will be discontinuing (or reducing) 15-20% of our usual meal items and replacing them with (or adding) healthier options that feature plant-based proteins and produce.

This will involve formulating, testing, and serving exciting and delicious new recipes that contain more vegetables and beans and less fat, cholesterol, and salt. These reasonable and straightforward changes will help expose our customers to healthier meal patterns and will encourage more balanced eating.

**Most importantly, it will help to prevent and reverse diet-related diseases.**

You are probably wondering how this will affect your role within our food service operations. The changes we make to the menus will only affect a small percentage of the overall operations, and they may present you the opportunity to acquire new kitchen skills that will benefit you both in your career and in your personal life. Any necessary training will take place prior to implementation of changes and will take place during regular work hours.

In these trainings you may find the opportunity to learn more about the connection between nutrition and health, knife skills and food prep skills, healthy cooking techniques and modifications to recipes, and more balanced meal assembly.

In general, you’ll want to highlight the opportunity to acquire new skills and keep up with growing trends in food service; that balanced menus are inclusive of diverse customers and thus improve overall satisfaction; that making health-conscious choices accessible is a responsibility your institution takes seriously; and that the skills acquired through trainings will add value to the personal and professional lives of your staff.
In the final part of the guide, we'll cover the implementation process and soliciting feedback. You'll also find helpful marketing strategies that will have your customers choosing the healthiest options on the menu.

For any additional support, get in touch with us at menus@balanced.org.