

EFFECTIVE COST CONTROL THROUGH PRODUCT PREPARATION, PORTIONING, AND PACKAGING

Preparation of Menu Items (Product Production)

Your food cost standards and client satisfaction are best maintained through the preparation of standardized food items. To achieve that goal, standardized recipes are necessary for all menu items. Standardized recipes:

1. Enable different personnel to prepare food products that are consistent in taste, appearance, and overall quality
2. Mean that consistent amounts of ingredients are used to produce a given amount of a menu item
3. Lead to consistent yields when a menu item is prepared
4. Are pre-costed to ensure that the cost of a menu item is acceptable for the program's food cost standards
5. Incorporate standard preparation procedures which helps standardize labor usage and labor costs
6. Generally reduce client complaints regarding a menu item

Standardized recipes can be obtained from sources such as recipe books oriented toward foodservice operations (***Food for Fifty***, for example) or can be standardized by your program personnel. To standardize a recipe:

1. Prepare the recipe, very carefully measuring, weighing, or counting ingredients and recording the exact amounts of each ingredient used.
2. Detailed preparation procedures should be carefully recorded.
3. Once prepared, the yield from the recipe should be carefully measured and recorded
4. The prepared product should be evaluated by program personnel (and clients, if possible) for taste, appearance, texture, and other appropriate quality parameters.

5. If the evaluation determines that quality improvements are needed, adjustments should be made to the ingredients included in the product, the amount of one or more ingredients used, and/or the preparation procedures.
6. If the yield is unsatisfactory, ingredient amounts should be proportionately adjusted to change the yield.
7. When the recipe adjustments have been made, steps 1-4 above should be repeated, as necessary, until a standardized recipe is developed which consistently produces a standardized product acceptable to your program. When that goal is achieved, the standardized recipe should be prepared by more than one of your production personnel to be sure that the product can be consistently prepared by multiple personnel.

Standard production procedures are important to avoid yield shrinkage as menu items are prepared. For example, if a soup is allowed to boil for too long a period instead of just simmering slowly, evaporation of the broth will occur, leading to a lower amount of soup available for serving to clients. Or, if a roast is cooked at too high a temperature or for too long a time period, excessive moisture will be lost from the roast resulting in a lower cooked weight and a lower yield from the roast. Such variances in production procedures will also impact the quality of the product. For example, the soup may be too thick in consistency or may taste too salty or the roast may become tough and hard to chew as well as taste dry because of the loss of moisture.

Even if products are not prepared "from scratch", but are prepared from "convenience items", such as canned spaghetti sauce. It is still important to have standardized recipes and/or standardized preparation procedures. The convenience product becomes an "ingredient" for the standardized recipe. Frozen lasagna may be used as a menu item. It must be thawed and heated in accord with a standardized procedure so that the product is heated through to the proper temperature without causing over-browning of the edges and/or excessive shrinkage in the volume of the product. There is only one ingredient for this recipe (the frozen lasagna), but the procedure for the preparation of that lasagna must be standardized for consistent yield and product quality.

Effective management of costs is not possible without the development and incorporation of standardized recipes and standard preparation procedures into your foodservice operation.

PROGRAM SELF-EVALUATION:

1. Are standardized recipes being used in your program? If not, why not?
2. Do you have a process for standardizing recipes that might be used in your program? If not, could you standardize recipes for use in your program?
3. Do you have standard procedures for the preparation of menu items?
4. If you are using convenience items, do you have standard procedures for how those items are used on your menu? Or is there an assumption that because these products are convenience items, no standard procedures are necessary for their use?
5. If you are not currently using standard recipes, would your program personnel be willing to accept the use of standard recipes and standard procedures? If not, why not?
6. Do your personnel feel that they know how to cook and don't need recipes to work from? If so, would they be willing to share their experience to help develop standard recipes which everyone can use?

Portioning and Packaging of Prepared Items

One very costly problem frequently encountered by programs is their failure to establish standardized portions and portioning procedures and maintain careful portion control. Failure to maintain good portion control will not only contribute to excess costs, but can contribute to client complaints when they do not receive consistent portions in their meals. Even though standardized recipes are used or pre-prepared products are used for the menu items, if the portions served for these products are not consistent, meal costs will not be consistent and will not meet established cost standards.

Standard portions:

1. Help assure that the expected number of portions will consistently be obtained from the standard yield of a standardized recipe.
2. Help prevent product waste that can occur when personnel over-produce an item to be sure they have "enough to go around".
3. Help prevent menu item shortages, or "running out" of a menu item, during the packaging of meals for distribution to clients.
4. Maintain meal and item consistency for clients
5. Are essential if the desired meal costs are to be maintained.

To achieve the goal of serving standard portions, the following items are necessary.

1. Proper portioning tools must be provided to personnel. Such tools include items such as different size ladles , "ice cream" scoops, and containers for items.
2. Standard pans must be used for items such as brownies or lasagna baked/cooked in pans, and standard cuts must be established for each item and each pan size used for the item (i.e. brownies baked in an 18" X 26" sheet pan might be cut into 60 portions by establishing a procedure to cut 6 slices lengthwise and 10 slices crosswise)
3. Portion standards and the proper portioning tools or procedures to be used for each type of menu item must be posted or otherwise readily available to all personnel
4. All personnel, including volunteers, must be trained in the importance of standardized portions and proper portioning procedures.

The packing of the meal items for distribution should be planned to support standardized portions. Packaging containers should be selected which are sized to the desired portion sizes, where possible. Portions that are too large cannot be packaged in a container

that is sized to accommodate a specific portion size. Careful selection of packaging materials can also contribute to effective cost management. Packaging materials vary considerably in price. Choosing the optimum priced packaging for the type of items served on the menu which will also facilitate appropriate temperature maintenance can contribute to effective cost management.

While standardized recipes are essential for effective cost control, that control will be lost unless standard portions are served from the items prepared from the standard recipes.

Personnel cannot be expected to consistently serve standard portions of menu items unless they are provided with the proper portioning tools.

PROGRAM SELF-EVALUATION:

1. Do you currently have standard portions established for your food items? If not, why not?

2. Are there tools available to your personnel which would enable them to consistently measure standard portions of the menu items? If so, are your personnel using those consistently using those tools? Using them correctly? If not, why not?

3. Is product being thrown away/wasted on a regular basis? Or, are larger portions sometimes served to be sure all the prepared product is used?

4. Are portions sometimes reduced as personnel make an effort to have enough product to serve all the clients?

5. Is the packaging used in your program of an optimum size to support portion control efforts? If not, is there better packaging available at a reasonable cost?