



## **Food Service Management**

Many of the Patterson Court fraternities and eating-houses provide food services to their members. Food service can be a very positive experience for an organization, or it can be a financial nightmare. Established “sit-down” meal times can do a great deal to promote interaction and communication among members, bringing the organization together as a whole at least once a day. If operated effectively, food service can also be a moneymaker for the organization.

Given that a organization has decided to provide food service, and given that meals will be served on organization premises rather than in a dining hall or somewhere outside of the organization’s house, there remains a decision to be made regarding whether to have food catered or to operate a kitchen.

Before deciding to operate its own kitchen, an organization should check into local health ordinances. Costs of equipping an approved cooking and serving area, hiring cooks, providing storage for inventory, purchasing dishware and flatware, pots and pans, beverage dispensers, paper goods, and other expenses should be carefully weighed against the desired board charges. Some organizations have decided that having meals catered is more affordable proposition. Others have gone together with nearby organizations to operate a central kitchen in one location with warming and serving equipment in separate dining areas.

### **Menu Planning**

The average family spends approximately 34 percent of its food money for meat and fish; 19 percent for fresh produce; 12 percent for bread, cereals, and flours; 13 percent for dairy products; 6 percent for fats and sugar; and 17 percent for miscellaneous groceries, staples, etc. These figures may provide some relative measures in planning your food purchases.

Meals will be more appealing with consideration of the weather and temperature, the season, holidays, or special likes of the organization members. Color, neatness, texture, food temperature, aroma, and seasoning are extremely important, as well, to the way in which food will be received. Remember these things when planning and ordering food.

It is very common that menu planners will put the organization on a meal “cycle” that ensures variety in recipes, as well as consistency in balancing food groups. It is important to remember, however, that food prices will vary in accord with what is in season and that certain foods are more appealing at one time of the year than another. Meal cycles should preferably not repeat themselves more frequently than every three weeks, to avoid being predictable or routine.

Preprocessed foods are very popular these days. Since labor is one of the greatest expenses in kitchen operation, preprocessing may save the organization money, but remember that preprocessed foods do cost more than purchasing raw product, so each organization must therefore closely monitor its total kitchen budget. The quality and appeal of preprocessed foods must also be carefully considered.

## **Bulk Buying**

Chances are, if you provide a food service where meals are prepared in your house, the food purveyors (e.g. Sysco, etc.) will find you. You will probably not need the yellow pages to locate wholesalers. There are four rules of thumb, however, that you will need to keep in mind when dealing with purveyors.

1. *Their purpose in life is to sell you something.* Be certain you know what you want, and stick to it. Feel free to ask lots of questions about the products. Try to establish good rapport with the salespersons, but don't play favorites.
2. *Ask other fraternities or eating-houses about their experiences with food purveyors.* Ask about consistency or quality, delivery schedules, relative pricing, billing procedures, etc. While you're at it, trade recipes!
3. *Bigger is generally better, that is buying larger quantities of a product will generally get you a better price per unit of measure.* You should not, however, buy more than you can use or store effectively.
4. *Checking the goods on delivery is part of the buying process.* Examine products relative to their specifications, numbers, sizes or weights, and condition. Don't leave products sitting by the back door until someone arrives to put them away. It should be possible to learn when deliveries are coming and to arrange help if you need it.

## **Tips for Effective Management**

The following budget busters will ruin your best-laid plans!

1. "Open" kitchens – you'll need an open budget!
2. Theft – watch cooks, waiters, etc; be careful with charge accounts at grocery stores.
3. Unrealistic menus – try, whenever possible, to accommodate special requests, but be real!
4. No-shows – can lead to tremendous waste. Require people to sign out 24-hours in advance if they plan to miss a meal.
5. Guests – Oh! They forgot to mention the exchange dinner this week? Require proper notice and funding for extra persons.
6. Special functions – parents' day, football weekend, etc. If they weren't figured into the original budget, secure additional budget appropriations.

Implement the following cost-saving measures:

1. Know your people – give them input into menu planning.
2. Establish one-person purchasing and control.
3. Use established procedures – don't waiver.
4. Plan more accurately. Keep accurate records regarding meals served, quantities used, etc.
5. Check your deliveries – don't accept things you didn't order or things that are of poor quality.
6. Take inventory frequently – remember to rotate stock.