

Production Planning Checklist for Commercial Kitchens

Practical steps for campus, corporate, hotel, and cruise kitchens to cook closer to what guests actually eat.

Start with three numbers

Every kitchen in this checklist starts the same way. Record these three numbers for each menu item at every service. A few weeks of them will show which items are routinely overproduced and which run out early.

1

Prepared

How much of the item was cooked for the service. Weigh it net of the container.

2

Served

Prepared minus what was left at the station when service ended.

3

Unserved

What was left over, before it was reused, donated, or discarded.

Tip: the free Metafoodx Kitchen Tracking Template does the math for you and suggests a next batch size for each item.

12.5M tons

of surplus food came from U.S. foodservice in 2024 ([ReFED](#))

\$157B

was the value of that surplus, about 14% of foodservice sales ([ReFED](#))

28%

of the food wasted worldwide is wasted in food service ([UNEP](#))

Then review them once a week

- 1 Sort the week's menu items by unserved %, highest first.
- 2 Pick the three items with the most unserved product by weight.
- 3 Change one thing for each: batch size, pan size, cook timing, or portion.
- 4 Write the change down, then compare the next two or three services.

Campus and university dining

Menu cycles bring the same dishes back every few weeks, which gives campus kitchens a built-in way to learn.

- ☐ **Size batches from the cycle.** Before a dish runs again, set its batch from the last two or three times it was served, not from the original par.
- ☐ **Cook in waves.** Cover the opening rush, then cook the rest based on how fast the first batch moves. Switch to smaller pans in the last hour.
- ☐ **Put the academic calendar in the forecast.** Exam weeks, breaks, home game weekends, and move-in days all shift headcount.
- ☐ **Plan repurposing ahead.** Write uses for likely extras into the cycle menu. The ReFED and MCURC [Repurpose With a Purpose toolkit](#) has recipes to start from.
- ☐ **Read the plate returns.** If an item regularly comes back half-eaten, test a smaller portion before pulling it from the menu.

Corporate dining

Corporate cafes have a forecasting input most segments lack: the client's own attendance data.

- ☐ **Forecast from attendance.** Ask the client for badge-swipe counts, desk-booking data, or a weekly in-office estimate.
- ☐ **Set pars by day of week.** One weekly par tends to overproduce on light days and run short on peak days.
- ☐ **Lock catering orders early.** A firm cutoff for meeting orders tells the kitchen how many people will eat upstairs instead of in the cafe.
- ☐ **Ease off the hot wells after the peak.** Cook smaller batches once the rush passes and lean on made-to-order stations.
- ☐ **Compare sites.** When one location keeps producing more than it serves, look for an outdated par or a station prepping too far ahead.
- ☐ **Share the numbers.** Production and consumption data gives the client's sustainability team something concrete to report.

Hotels and resorts

Hotel kitchens can plan from data the front office already tracks.

- ☐ **Forecast breakfast from the house count.** Use occupancy, group blocks, and breakfast-included rates to set each morning's buffet quantities.
- ☐ **Start buffets from history and refill small.** Set opening quantities from past consumption, then refill with smaller or shallower pans.
- ☐ **Plan the last 30 to 45 minutes.** Stop full refills, consolidate pans, and move slow items into smaller vessels.
- ☐ **Track banquet attendance against the guarantee.** Log actuals by event type and client, and set your overset from that history instead of a flat number.
- ☐ **Give unserved food somewhere to go.** Back-of-house product that never reached the line can feed the employee dining room or go to a donation partner. Less than 1% of foodservice surplus is donated today ([ReFED](#)).

Cruise lines

A ship's galley plans for an entire voyage at once, with limited chances to resupply.

- ☐ **Split sea days from port days.** Onboard lunch counts can drop sharply when guests go ashore, while sea days push more traffic through the buffet.
- ☐ **Provision from past sailings.** Consumption history from earlier voyages on the same itinerary is a firmer basis than a fleet-wide standard.
- ☐ **Forecast by venue.** The main dining room, buffet, and specialty restaurants share the same guests, so a shift in one changes the others.
- ☐ **Factor in the passenger mix.** Family sailings, longer itineraries, and different source markets change what guests choose.
- ☐ **Use the final days to draw down stock.** Build last-day menus around what remains in the storeroom.

Metafoodx is an AI-powered food intelligence platform that helps foodservice operations reduce waste, cut costs, and improve kitchen efficiency. Ready to see how we can help transform your food service operation? [Book a demo](#) with our team today.

Sources: ReFED, [Foodservice Sector Food Waste fact sheet](#) (2024 data) and [Restaurant and Foodservice recommendations](#); UNEP, [International Day of Zero Waste press release](#) (March 2026).

Daily production log

Print one per station and service. Weigh food net of the container, use one unit per item, and log plate waste separately.

Date _____ Meal period _____ Station _____ Recorded by _____

Menu item	Unit	Prepared	Unservd	Served*	Sold out at	Next prep adjustment

*Served = prepared minus unserved. Unserved is food left at the station when service ends, before it is reused, donated, or discarded. Enter the totals in the Metafoodx Kitchen Tracking Template to track unserved % and plan the next batch.