

The Future of Foodservice



Demetrio Zavala
Executive Chef

Inflation, supply chain problems, labor shortages and more: There's no shortage of issues and challenges in the foodservice industry. In spite of it all, Corporate Executive Chef Demetrio Zavala has successfully opened multiple restaurants during the pandemic.

The Tyson Fresh Meats Foodservice Team interviewed Chef Zavala to discuss trends in the foodservice industry, the future of foodservice, navigating the current climate of the restaurant business and the importance of partnering with the right foodservice supplier.

Q: You've had a lot of success in opening multiple restaurants during a global pandemic. What is your secret to success?

Our operations focused on creating food that was relevant and approachable to guests. We transformed the way we used to operate by asking ourselves: How can we make (online) ordering easier for our guests? We used an online ordering platform called Bbot that was able to integrate with our POS system. This program was free during the pandemic, which helped save money. We also implemented wine programs and Zoom wine dinners that helped customers feel like they were in the restaurant from their homes. Finally, we also increased our social media efforts by creating video content.

Q: Costs on just about everything are rising. How can foodservice operators sustain their profits during periods of inflation? Do "market price" menu items make sense for those dishes with price volatile ingredients like beef and pork?

We were experiencing a lot of shortages on all commodities across the board. We had to use the symbol MP since prices were changing daily and this allowed us to communicate the proper price on items, as they went up. This helped the restaurant to stay profitable.

Q: Fine dining, steakhouses and independent full-service restaurants have been the hardest hit during the pandemic. Do you see these formats coming back? How long will it take? How will they differ from pre-pandemic?

I think it will take some time to come back. Most people feel uncertain about going out to eat as much as they did in the past. I think, it will take at least a year, maybe the summer of 2022. Most restaurants are looking to run their operations tighter now than in the past after everything.

Q: If you are debating switching foodservice meat suppliers (i.e., beef and pork), what value adds help convince you to change?

What's most important to me is honest communication on the protein prices and if the prices are going up or down. Another thing I would like to see is if a company would post my restaurant on their social media to help promote.

Q: How can restaurants increase transparency with their customers?

I think restaurants can increase transparency with their customers by training that is done in their four walls. This means servers being trained to inform the guest we are using this meat company and why. Inform the guest of how it's being prepared and how this preparation enhances the meat.

Q: What are some foodservice solutions you recommend that will help chefs maintain the integrity of beef and pork dishes in takeout?

Chefs must think about the travel time. Remember food will still cook in to-go containers. I would suggest cooking a steak MR if it's ordered medium, making it a lower temperature to ensure proper temperature when it arrives to the guest. Another thing to think about with delivery food is presentation, it needs to be eye appealing, people eat with their eyes first. Flavor should be outstanding every time.

Q: What recommendations do you have for a restaurant's back of house that can help to sustain business and keep customers coming back?

The best way to sustain customers: serve crave-worthy and consistent food, stay on top of food presentation since customers eat with their eyes, use adjectives on the food menus to make the food sound delicious and share all reviews with the BOH staff to keep them motivated and in good spirits; employees in positive environments will always cook better food. My grandma always told me, to cook happy because the food will always be great.

Q: Supply chain issues have been rampant during the pandemic. How have you navigated the shortages and how can restaurants be more prepared for unexpected product issues in the future?

I have been extremely diligent when it came to ordering, especially proteins. With the shortages, we reprinted the menu every week to show new items because of the shortages. Restaurants need to plan at least a week ahead, talk to their purveyors, ask what is guaranteed to come and what's a maybe. Always run the menu with the guaranteed menu items, this may mean pre-purchasing items to ensure delivery.