

## **ENEE, MENEE, MEINEE, MO: SELECTING YOUR FOODSERVICE EQUIPMENT**

After several months of planning for your new restaurant concept, you find yourself in a meeting with your kitchen designer. It is time to select the equipment for your restaurant. Suddenly you find yourself buried under 47 catalogs and a list of options that, if stretched out completely, would circle the globe two and half times. This process can be a daunting task, unless you know how to proceed. This month, we will look at some of the important issues to consider when selecting the foodservice equipment for your facility.

### Predict Your Own Future

Before you begin the process of selecting equipment for the current concept, consider what the future will hold for your operation. First, consider flexibility. Do you anticipate that the concept will change over time? If so, you should plan for the equipment to be easily modified or replaced over time. If the concept will succeed or fail with the current concept, then planning for flexibility is not as critical. Second, consider whether this investment is a long-term or short-term investment. If you plan to own and operate the facility for an extended period of time, it is in your best interest to invest in reliable, quality equipment. If, on the other hand, you intend to sell the restaurant or significantly modify the concept within the first few years of operation, it may be wise to invest in medium grade equipment that will suit your needs for the specified amount of time.

### Review the Menu

Before you can begin the equipment selection process, you should have your menu established. It is possible to select the equipment without a menu, but doing so will result in a facility that is not specifically tailored to your operation. Too often, the end result from such an effort is a configuration that is less than ideal. For the following example, let's assume that your menu is available.

The selection of equipment for a facility should be methodical. The best way to approach this task is to review each menu item and list the individual pieces of

equipment that will be required for preparation. The quantity of the product(s) requiring preparation will also influence the equipment selection process. Consider each ingredient and follow it through the facility from the time it enters the receiving area to the time it is returned to the kitchen after service. Take something as simple as a baked potato, and follow it through the facility. One mentor of mine appropriately referred to this as the potato trick.

The potatoes will be received in bulk. They first need to be checked and weighed in your receiving station. The equipment in a typical receiving station (addressed in the July 2002 column) is therefore required. Once the potatoes are accepted, they will need to be stored in dry storage. You can't keep them on the floor, so a dunnage rack will be required to make sure that your potatoes are stored six inches off the floor, per the health code. When it is time to make your baked potatoes, you will need to clean and scrub them. So ... we need a sink. A two compartment is preferred to allow preparation of raw and ready-to-eat products simultaneously. Next, a work surface will be required to prepare the potatoes before placing them in the oven. Oh yeah, we'll need an oven and an exhaust hood system (in most cases).

Do you think you are done? Not quite. Once the potatoes are cooked, where will they be held? In a warming drawer? Under heat lamps? The storage configuration will vary based on your operational needs. The baked potato, after service, will need to return to the ware washing area for removal and cleaning of the serving piece. Only after considering how the trash will be removed, will this process be complete.

At the end of this process you will have a list of equipment required for the preparation of every component of your menu. Once the list is compiled, you can review it for consolidation and elimination of duplications in equipment. In some instances, this effort may result in a modified preparation method. For example, if you find that a piece of equipment is listed for the preparation of only one item, you may consider modifying the preparation method or eliminating the item altogether, if it is not a key component of the menu or concept.

## Multi-Purpose Equipment

If planned in advance, the foodservice equipment in your facility can be selected and configured to serve multiple purposes, thereby reducing the need for specialized equipment. Perhaps the most underutilized piece of equipment in any kitchen is the mixer. The hub (or knobby thing, as many refer to it) on the front of the mixer is capable of fitting numerous attachments that will let you do anything from grind meat to grate cheese. Even better, these tasks can be performed while the mixer is running with product in the bowl. Unfortunately, the hub cover on most mixers is never removed, leaving enormous cost savings unrealized. Another example of a piece of equipment that can be used for multiple purposes is the convection oven ... with the cook and hold control option. That's right, some convection ovens offer a cook and hold option that, depending on your operation, can eliminate the need to purchase an expensive piece of equipment. This option allows the oven cavity to function in either a convection oven mode or a cook and hold oven mode. Consider the efficiency in using the convection oven during peak periods, and then setting up a slow roast to cook during non-peak periods. Let the equipment work for you ... not the other way around.