



THE RETAILER'S GUIDE  
TO **Food Service**

**TRANSACT**<sup>®</sup>

## Foreword

The retail industry is very much at a crossroads, both literally and figuratively. The humble convenience store, located at important roads and intersections, serves a range of customer needs:

First, providing fuel to get customers where they need to go.

Second, selling convenient and handy consumer goods.

Third, and most recently, serving tasty and affordable food.

Convenience stores are now going head-to-head with restaurants and grocery stores, fighting for the honor of feeding hungry customers.

It's stiff competition, but convenience stores have a better shot than you might think. Accessibility, speed of service, and price add up to food that's tasty, fast, and affordable – a tempting combination, to be sure!

If the store operator plays their cards right, they could become a more popular dining destination than some of their restaurant neighbors!

**Makes your mouth water, doesn't it?**





## What This Ebook Will Do For You

This ebook will help you:

- ✓ Set up an efficient food service facility
- ✓ Maintain a smooth food production operation
- ✓ Ensure food quality and safety

At the end of this, you will know how to run an effective food service operation that both you and your customers will be pleased with!

## PART I: Setup Secrets

### Your Kitchen **Layout**

The kitchen will be the heart and soul of your food service operations. Your staff will need proper equipment and space to prep and cook, so you need to give them that kind of elbow room.

It's not going to be a full-service commercial kitchen, but it still has to follow basic principles:

- **Divide areas by function:** storage, prep, cooking, and waste should be in distinct areas that make sense in relation to the rest of the store. For example, waste should be next to the back door, far from the food, for easy disposal.
- **Air ventilation:** Have range fans and air purifiers to keep odors and smoke under control.
- **Multi-use equipment:** You're tight on space, so you can't afford to have specialized equipment that only one food item will use. Furnish the kitchen with equipment that can service many foods in case you start serving different food items later on.
- **Comply with health codes:** You're still subject to health, safety, and fire codes, even if you're primarily a retail operation. Research and comply.
- **Space efficiency:** Maximize the space you're allotted. Don't buy a double-deep fryer when a single deep fryer will do. Then, use the additional space for another piece of equipment.



## Kitchen Staffing

You won't have nearly as much kitchen staff as a restaurant, but you will still need to make smart hiring decisions based on your unique setup.

Here are some staffing best practices to try:

- **Separate responsibilities:** It's a good idea to hire exclusively for the kitchen. That means your kitchen people won't be expected to help in the store, and vice versa. It's easier to hire specialists than it is to hire for a mixed role, and as a bonus you minimize potential contamination incidents.
- **Hire for longer hours and more shifts:** Hiring a bunch of part-timers with short hours is harder to manage and will lead to sloppier kitchen operations. Fewer employees that work longer shifts work out better for everyone. The employee gets more money, and you get more stability.
- **Automate for flexibility:** Even larger retail kitchens will have fewer staff than a traditional restaurant, so it helps to automate routine or mundane tasks. This helps with labor costs and scheduling, since you'll be able to get more done with fewer people.

## Staff Scheduling

The kitchen staff's working hours will have to be scheduled, just the same as those of the retail staff.

Scheduling is an art form. Do it right, and you have relaxed, motivated employees who will be happy to go to work. Do it wrong, and your employees will be surly and resentful.



## PART II: Food Production

### Managing Food Waste

Waste is a very costly issue in food service, even for a business with multiple revenue streams like a convenience store. Businesses need to cut down on as much pre-consumer waste as possible in order to maximize their profit margins.

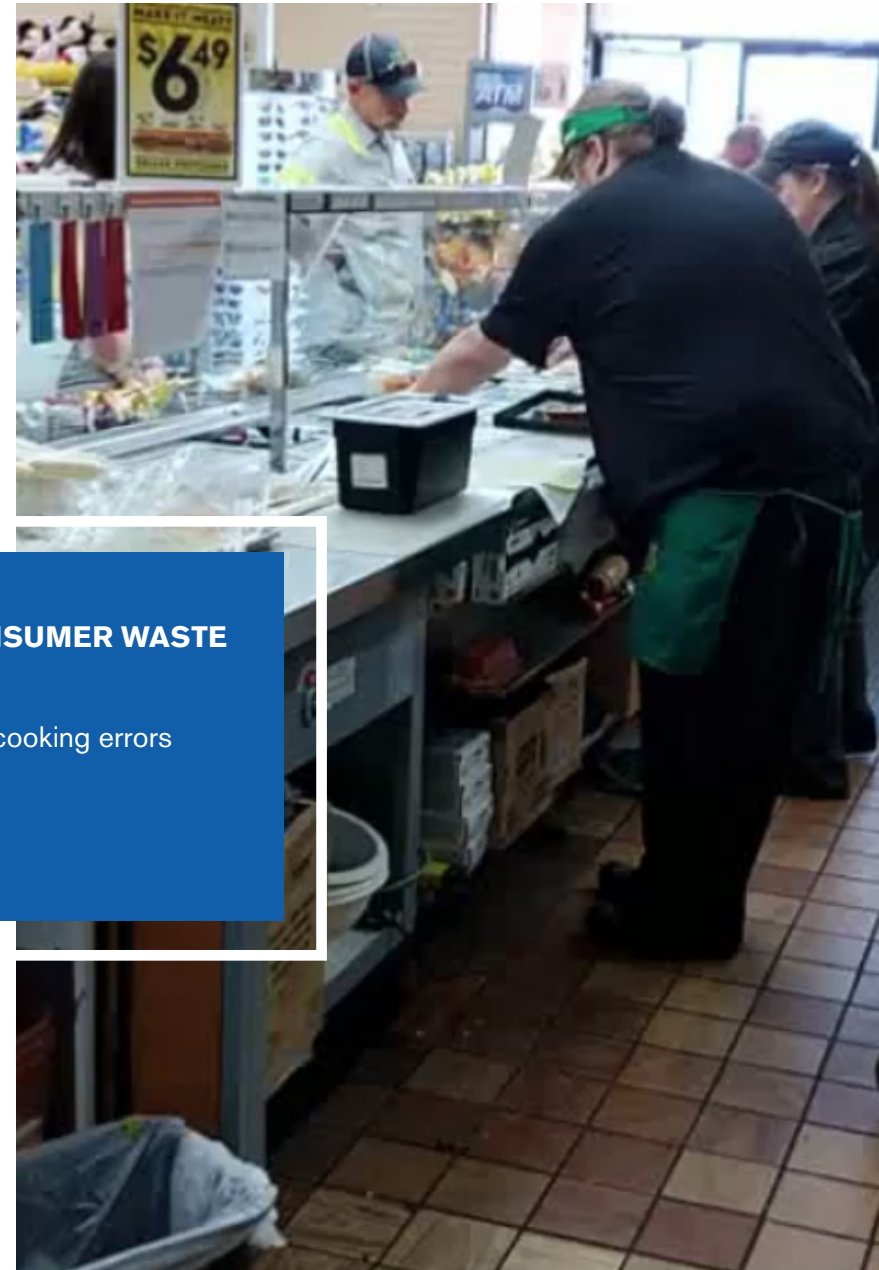
Fortunately, the restaurant business has been at this a long time, and we can pick up some of their best practices.

Practices like:

- Conducting waste audits
- Forecasting needs
- Maximizing inventory
- First in, first out

The process begins with a waste audit, where you actually examine the amount of waste being generated by your store and discover what creates the most waste. Food spoilage? Mistakes in the kitchen? Something else?

This waste audit should be conducted on a regular basis, especially as new staff rotate in and out.



#### PRE-CONSUMER VS POST-CONSUMER WASTE

##### Pre-Consumer Food Waste:

food prep scraps, spoiled supplies, cooking errors

##### Post-Consumer Food Waste:

customer leftovers

## Forecasting Needs

You need to figure out how much food you'll need to stock for each cycle before you actually order. This will be more difficult for new stores, but once you've been in business for a while you should have a history that you can base your decisions on.

Experienced managers will be able to predict foot traffic based on things like:

- Proximity of closest workplaces, residences, or highways
- Rush hour traffic
- Nearby construction projects
- Weather patterns
- Local food culture and preferences

Keep in mind that forecasting doesn't just include tracking busy periods. It also includes what food items to stock. Corporate might recommend stocking lots of pizza, but if your patrons love hot dogs, then you should obviously stock more of the latter.

## Maximizing Inventory

Retail operators know the value of maximizing inventory better than anyone. Every food item or ingredient in stock is money you've committed. If you lose or misuse that item, that's money you're never getting back.

Having said that, food service requires a slightly different approach to inventory. Here are some quick tips to help give you an advantage:

- ✓ **REGULAR INVENTORY** is a must in food services. Have staff take regular counts of product to minimize theft and over-ordering.
- ✓ **USE INVENTORY SOFTWARE.** Paper forms are okay, but app-based tracking is easier to perform and track.

- ✓ **ARRANGE ITEMS ON THE SHELF** so that the oldest stuff is easier to get to. First In, First Out!
- ✓ **STORE FOOD PROPERLY** to minimize losses due to spoilage and reduce the risk of food safety violations.
- ✓ **LOW-STOCK INVENTORY** maximizes your cash flow and reduces loss from over-ordering. Just make sure you're accurately forecasting traffic.
- ✓ **STORE INGREDIENTS WHEN NOT IN USE.** Don't leave them in the open to spoil!



## PART III: Food Safety

### The Importance of Food Safety

Food service is becoming an ever-more important part of a retailer's success, with [69% of shoppers saying they purchased prepared food in the last month](#).

It's in your best interest to provide food that is tasty, satisfying, and, above all, safe for your customers.

If your convenience store is going to draw people away from grocery stores and fast food, you need to conquer their [fear of low c-store quality and freshness](#).

The only sure-fire way to do that is by making food safety a #1 priority in your establishment.

#### What are people eating?



\*Convenience Store Consumer Study, Alix Partners

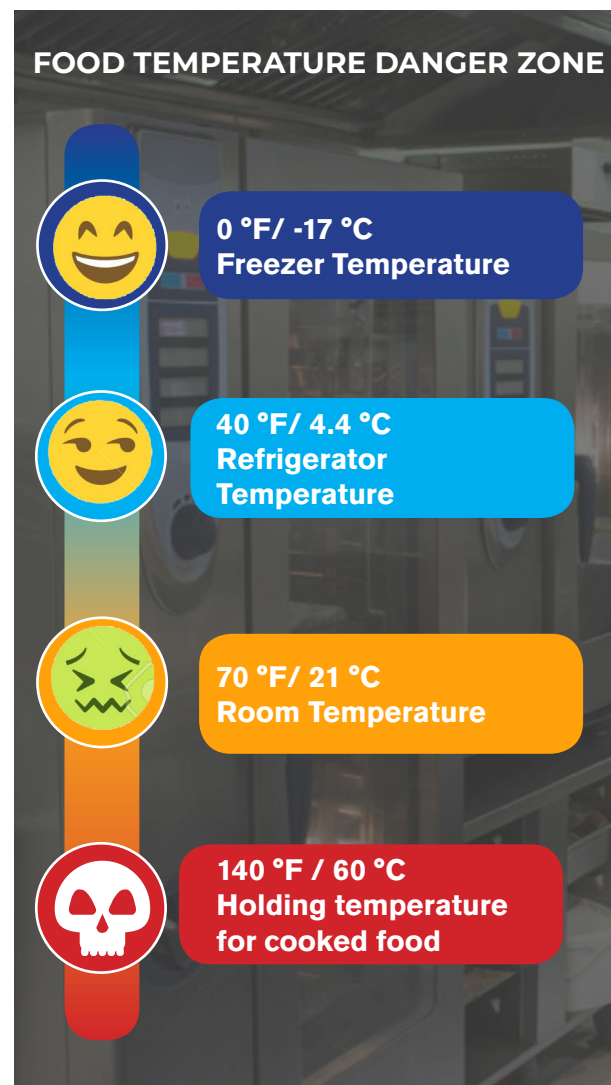
## Common Food Safety Risks

Some might assume that retailers don't need to pay much attention to food safety risks because they're not a full-service restaurant. It's actually the complete opposite: your c-store is even more at risk, especially in these areas:

- ✓ **IMPROPER HAND WASHING:** Retail staff shouldn't go into the kitchen to prepare the food, but they will still have to handle food items at the front of the store. They shift boxes, stack shelves and handle money. If they're careless, they risk contaminating food by handling it with bare hands.
- ✓ **CONTAMINATED FOOD CONTACT SURFACES:** Convenience stores have very limited table space, even for stores with made-to-order kitchen facilities. Customer-accessible areas are a very high contamination risk. Even the food warmers themselves are dangerous if not cleaned regularly.
- ✓ **IMPROPER FOOD HEATING:** Kitchenless store locations won't have access to a grill or stove, and will have to rely on warmers and microwaves. Unmaintained warmers risk running at temperatures that are too low to prevent bacteria growth. Microwaves heat food inconsistently, and may leave cold spots in food that may cause food poisoning.
- ✓ **CONTAMINATED PRODUCTS:** Suppliers are responsible for delivering products that are safe to consume, but every so often

something goes wrong and the store receives stock that is unfit for sale or consumption. Store employees aren't usually aware there is something wrong with the product until a customer gets sick.

- ✓ **IMPROPER COLD STORAGE TEMPERATURE:** Food products need to be kept at the proper storage temperature, especially fresh produce and meats. Pre-cooked food stocks are in storage for longer periods of time than your average restaurant, and there is a higher risk of spoilage going unnoticed.
- ✓ **FOOD LABELLING ERRORS:** Grab-and-go meals like sandwiches, pasta, and salads may be mislabelled with the wrong expiration date. Insufficient allergen information may also be a risk for sensitive customers. Ingredients for made-to-order meals may not have clear labeling to indicate age or expiration.
- ✓ **PESTS AND VERMIN:** Open or carelessly stocked food products and containers are susceptible to invasion by pests like ants, roaches, and rats, which carry diseases that are potentially lethal to humans when consumed.



## Food Safety Best Practices

- ✓ **REGULAR HAND WASHING:** Retailer employees should wash their hands regularly, even (or especially) after handling non-food-related tasks.
- ✓ **CAREFUL FOOD HANDLING:** Employees should use tongs or gloves as much as possible when taking food out of the warmer, and dispose of gloves after every use. Made-to-order kitchen staff should always keep their hands clean and wash all tools, utensils, and dishes.
- ✓ **FACILITY SANITATION:** All store surfaces and countertops should be wiped down on a regular basis, particularly areas used in the preparation of food (either by the employee or the customer) such as the beverage counter or the made-to-order kitchen.
- ✓ **REGULAR MAINTENANCE OF FOOD EQUIPMENT:** Make sure kitchens, food warmers and dispensers are cleaned and maintained as per manufacturer recommendations. Leftover food, crumbs, and spills should be cleaned as soon as possible.
- ✓ **FOOD TEMPERATURE MONITORING:** Monitor the temperatures of food warmers to ensure they don't fall into the danger zone. Make sure refrigerators and coolers are operating at the right temperature.
- ✓ **PREVENT CROSS-CONTAMINATION:** Don't let raw food ingredients touch each other, and never allow them to come into contact with prepared foods. Once an item has been touched or removed from the warmer, don't return it.
- ✓ **CLEAR LABELING:** Ensure all foods and perishable products are clearly labeled with the appropriate expiration dates and ingredients. If they don't come with prepackaged labels, display the information on signs or cards. Clearly label containers of made-to-order ingredients.



## Food Safety Technologies

- ✓ **TEMPERATURE MONITORING:** Monitor and log the temperatures of your refrigeration and warmer units. This advanced tech can save you significant amounts in food costs by preventing spoilage and waste from malfunctioning refrigerators and freezers. It also protects you from food safety violations caused by serving undercooked food.
- ✓ **INVENTORY MANAGEMENT:** A digital inventory system can help you keep better track of your perishable item stock levels, which helps you deal with the ebb and flow of demand in your stores. It also helps you report damaged products and recalled items to your distributors for a refund.
- ✓ **FOOD RECALL MANAGEMENT:** Owners can now be alerted right away in the event of a supplier recall. Recall management apps can help a retailer chain ensure every store in their area complies with the recall promptly.
- ✓ **FOOD LABELLING:** Label printing terminals help ensure food is marked with the most accurate information. Use-by dates and labels with ingredients and nutrition information need to be prominent. Labels are produced on-demand and batch printed to make this process more seamless.



## Resources

### **Foodsafety.gov**

Website: <https://www.foodsafety.gov/>

App: <https://www.foodsafety.gov/keep/foodkeeperapp/index.html>

This government website has all the information you could possibly need on food safety, both as a business owner and as a consumer. They even have an app on proper food storage that you can download and share with your employees.

### **FSIS Food Recall Alerts**

<https://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics/recalls-and-public-health-alerts/current-recalls-and-alerts>

The Food Safety and Information Service regularly issues recall announcements. Subscribe to their email alerts to know if there are any food products you need to pull off your shelves.