

5 STEPS TO BUILDING AN EFFECTIVE CYCLE MENU

1

Set Goals and Parameters

Think about your district, students, staff, equipment, storage, deliveries, and budget. Pick a cycle length and set goals that boost participation, reduce waste, control costs, or make daily operations run smoother.



2

Collect Data and Feedback

Review past menus and production records to see what worked for your program. Survey students or have quick conversations to learn what they like. Gather standardized recipes that you know work well.



3

Build the Menu Framework

Start with student favorites and add variety in flavors and colors. Pair sides with entrees, balance your budget with USDA Foods, and make the menu fun with theme days.



4

Consider Staffing and Logistics

Plan around your staff's skills, prep and service time, equipment, delivery schedules, and storage space. A menu only works if your team can execute it and it fits your operation.



5

Check for USDA Compliance

Reference the School Breakfast Program and National School Lunch Program Meal Pattern Requirements. Standardized recipes make it easy to ensure your menu meets the requirements every time.