

Hearty, healthy & wholesome

Make your Winter Food Service a feast for the senses

Food Service – where the customer eats their meal at the serving place – and HMR and Deli – where the meal will be eaten at home or offsite – have become increasingly intertwined. Food Service offerings influence the menu at HMR and Deli counters, and more supermarkets are employing a Food Service specialist team or chef to run their HMR department.

Consumer demand also dictates how the menu in your HMR counter evolves, as they look for the same out-of-home meal to be available as a partially or fully prepared meal to be consumed at home. For example, when sushi was first introduced in restaurants in South Africa, it was viewed suspiciously by many meat-eating, braai-loving South Africans. Then it began gaining popularity but was still nowhere to be found at supermarkets. Consumer demand grew, supermarkets saw an opportunity, and now, ready prepared sushi to take home is a familiar sight on supermarket shelves around the country.

Social media restaurant food posts also play a part in Food Service influencing HMR as delicious visuals stimulate interest and demand.

For in-store coffee shops and restaurants, the Food Service offer can showcase what's available in the store as an HMR option, while



Image courtesy of Dmitry Zvoloskiy, Pexels

the trends at your HMR counter will in some instances reflect the type of meals being ordered at restaurants. It's a fascinating relationship, and one that is constantly developing as food trends and consumers change over time. No matter the

menu evolution, the consumer requirements of convenience, a sensory experience, a break from routine, and from home food prep remain the same – with budget being variable. Gauging how much consumers living and/or working in your catchment area are willing and able to spend on restaurant, coffee shop and HMR/Deli food is critical to your offering – generally they will want more value for money at the HMR/Deli counter.

Food Service and HMR in winter is a particularly interesting time, as supermarkets have an opportunity to attract shoppers with tantalising aromas and a hearty tableau of warming dishes to chase away the winter blues.

Convenient and 'homemade'

Convenience is king for time-constrained consumers who still crave that homemade feeling, and the desire for nostalgic comfort food that our grannies used to make is on a par with the call for bold flavours and internationally inspired recipes. You can cater for this by introducing take-and-bake and pre-packaged meals.

Advertising your winter menu can help shoppers plan and provide meal inspiration which can be used for cross-merchandising. Taking the time to develop an interesting, enticing, and delicious



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menu that caters to your consumer's desires while considering this winter's food trends is well worth the effort.

A feast for the senses

Food trends that were sparked during lockdown are seemingly here to stay. Tough times call for comfort foods and nostalgia. Traditional recipes, as well as those that offer a twist on old favourites, are still high on the consumers' list of favourites. But they'll need to be up to standard – lockdown helped many home cooks hone their skills and they expect professionals to exceed or at the very least match these new capabilities.

- Curries are versatile, popular, and can answer the need for comfort food as well as add an exotic option – variations such as Cape Malay, Thai, vegetarian, Tikka Masala, Vindaloo, spicy hot or mild and tasty all offer a great way to spice up your food service.
- Stews, stroganoffs, roasts, braised meats, and baked pasta dishes are good winter options, alongside healthier soups, and a variety of bread options from your bakery.
- Include warming spices such as cinnamon, paprika, and chilli in mains and desserts.
- Local flavours and ingredients always hit the spot – South Africans love their traditional favourites.
- Tasting menus that consist of high-end cocktail foods and smaller portions, such as sliders or mini desserts, are a popular restaurant menu item that translates well to retail food service.



Image courtesy of Naim Benjelloun, Pexels

- Introducing flavours such as pumpkin spice, eggnog, chestnut, and spiced apple can attract consumers willing to experience something new, or to recreate a treasured travel memory. Consumers who acquired a taste for culinary explorations and exotic taste experiences from the comfort of their own home during lockdown remember their expanded horizons and are eager to embrace bold flavours, new ingredients, and international dishes. This widens your winter food service options considerably as you can add dishes from anywhere in the world.

Basic and wholesale meal options can still inspire your customers. Getting creative with best-value ingredients, seasonal, local produce and cheaper cuts of meat, and looking to times gone by for recipes that use these cuts can help reduce costs.

Using fewer ingredients can also help reduce costs as well as wastage, but you will need to be extra creative in the prep area to avoid repetition and boring food. Look to grains, pulses, legumes, soy, tofu, and other plant-based options to provide plant-based, hearty, protein-rich meals.

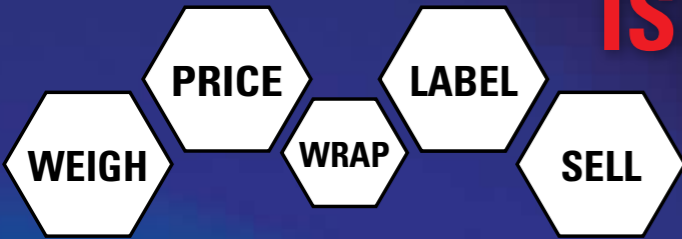
Value meals

Not all consumers are currently economically constrained, but as fuel prices soar and food prices follow, added financial burdens are causing even those relatively unscathed by the economic fallout of the Covid-19 pandemic to cut back and tighten their belts.

“ It makes good business sense to provide hearty, healthy and affordable options that cater for everyone, from singles on the go to extended families. ”

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Link to recipe courtesy of South African Mushroom Farmers Association (SAMFA) [▶▶▶▶▶](#)

Meat-free alternatives

Vegan, vegetarian, and flexitarian diets are on the rise for many different reasons, from those making the change on ethical or environmental grounds to those looking for a healthier diet (several vegetarian meat alternatives are approved by various heart and diabetes associations) and even those in need of a more affordable source of protein.

“Soy, seitan, grains and pulses, and mushrooms are all versatile and relatively cost-effective meat alternatives that can be used to create delicious winter dishes that tick all the boxes.” [▶▶](#)

It is worth remaining abreast of current social trends and initiatives to help your team plan their menus.

Meat-free Mondays are increasingly popular, so this could become an attraction at your store. The South African Mushroom Farmers’ Association (SAMFA) website provides a wealth of mushroom-based recipes and nutritional information.

Testament to the increase of interest in vegan food is the growth of Fry Family Food’s plant-based range. “We can see from our own sales figures and the growth of our company that the industry is changing at a rapid rate,” says Tammy Fry in an interview with vegconomist.com in April 2020. Consumers are looking for meat alternatives, so it makes sense to include these in your ready to eat winter meals offering.

Chef and cook training

Be aware of falling into a common meat-free pitfall. Not all chefs or cooks are comfortable with vegetarian or vegan cooking, which can result in bland, stodgy, or boring food that nobody wants to eat.

However, meat-free alternatives can be exceptionally versatile and tasty when prepared correctly.

“Appropriate training is vital to ensure your food service remains current, exciting and appealing to all consumers.”

Upskilling employees improves your food service and can also help with staff retention. [▶▶](#)

Effective training and implementing smart kitchen and production processes can also help your employees provide efficient, friendly, and customer-centric service, which helps build customer loyalty.

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- Reduced transport costs
- Less storage space required
- Lower total cost of ownership



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Image courtesy of Khaled Hossain, Pexels

Online shopping and food delivery

For many retailers, lockdown and the Covid-19 pandemic pushed the fast forward button on their entry into the online shopping and home delivery arena. And now that they have experienced the convenience and safety of shopping online, there are many consumers who would prefer to keep it that way – so you need to be on top of your e-commerce game.

When it comes to ready meals and food service, home delivery can be tricky. You will need to invest some time and money into finding the best practices for your business, as food needs to be delivered timeously as well as safely and hygienically.

“ Delivery drivers need to be well-trained and vehicles well-maintained as they are, in effect, your mobile representatives and can affect customer perceptions – a clash with a bad driver could lose you a potential online customer. ”



Image courtesy of Rachel Claire, Pexels

Reduce food wastage

Food wastage is a costly issue. You don't want to keep running short and disappointing customers, as this is a good way to lose business, but over catering creates financial and sustainability concerns. When it comes to planning your deli and ready-made menu, sales analysis, ingredient versatility and ensuring you use the correct quantity of ingredients for each dish is key. Using fewer ingredients per dish or reusing a staple ingredient in different ways requires creativity but can produce high yields with less effort and wastage. Using imperfect produce is yet another way to combat unnecessary food wastage.

You can also look to recipes and dishes with an intrinsically low wastage percentage. Tasting menus, smaller portions or 'miniature' dishes require fewer ingredients and produce a higher yield, which can help reduce wastage. Unilever Food Solutions South Africa have several 'wastage warrior' articles available online containing smart and practical tips for reducing waste, as well as easy recipes and menu ideas. If you do have surplus, in-date leftovers can be contributed to a charitable initiative.



Winter food trends to watch

- The top trends to watch this season include functional eating for health and wellness – from meat-free alternatives and veggie bowls to eating the rainbow, health is key. This is a trend that we will continue to see as health remains at the forefront of consumers' minds.
- Low sodium, avoiding trans fats, and using nutritious ingredients is important for consumers who are acutely aware of how food affects their health. This need is not negated by the demand for convenience, so ensure ready-made meals also answer a shopper's health needs. Ingredients such as pulses and mushrooms have additional health



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benefits that can be advertised alongside each dish – anything that boosts the immune system or helps fight colds and flu is sure to be received positively.

- Food safety and hygiene are still top priority as the flu and Covid seasons converge, but the desire for health and wellness is also paramount, especially since the Covid pandemic.
- Depending on your location, you may also need to consider speciality diets such as gluten- or dairy-free, sugar-free, keto, kosher, halaal, vegetarian, and vegan.
- Vegetables as mains are a healthier, more affordable option than most meat-based dishes, and the growing number of consumers who will tuck into a plant-based meal makes it a smart business move too.
- Budget-friendly meals that are convenient, tasty, and healthy are important for a wide variety of consumers, from students living away from home to young execs, busy families, and retirees tired of cooking for themselves.

Green kitchens

Last but not least is the green kitchen trend. Now more than ever, consumers are acutely aware of their environmental impact, and that extends to the brands they buy and even the stores they shop at. By reducing food wastage, sourcing organic, local produce, and embracing 100% recyclable or biodegradable serving containers and utensils, you are meeting both your environmental corporate social responsibility goals and addressing the growing number of eco-warrior consumers.



Image courtesy of Daria Shevtsova, Pexels

Recipe ideas

- **Oxtail.** Not a budget-friendly option, oxtail is a speciality dish perfect for winter.
- **Brisket.** An underrated cut in South Africa, slow cooked brisket can produce an excellent meaty dish.
- **Lentil or bean stew.** Hearty, filling winter fare that doesn't break the bank.
- **Soba noodle and mushroom soup.** Asian inspiration is a winter must but add nutritious vegetables for health-conscious consumers.
- **Nut roast or harvest loaf.** The vegan or vegetarian answer to meatloaf, these can be packed with nutrition and the ingredient options are incredibly flexible.
- **Winter panzanella.** Add winter vegetables and warming spices to make this classic Italian summer salad a winter staple.
- **Mediterranean halloumi salad.** The Mediterranean diet leans heavily towards plant-based meals and is certainly one of the healthiest diets from which you can take inspiration.
- **Pumpkin mash.** Comfort food with a twist.
- **Bobotie.** It's a South African favourite for a reason!

- **Vegetable biryani.** Indian cuisine is uniquely suited to rich, flavourful vegetarian dishes.
- **Meat-free chilli.** Soy-based mince alternatives or beans and lentils make a great veggie chilli base.
- **Ragu.** Any thick, meat-based sauce served with pasta will do, but be creative with your protein choices.
- **Cottage pie variations.** Think boerewors and bean instead of old-school mince.
- **Harissa-braised lamb shank** with carrot puree and anise scented yogurt. Lean proteins with complex flavours.
- **Tamales.** Mexican and Southwest American recipes are great winter dishes.
- **Broccoli and parmesan risotto.** Vegetarian dishes are versatile and nutritious.
- **Winter-spiced molten chocolate cake.** Baked, spiced, and hot desserts are a winter must. **SR**

Sources:

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Ann Baker-Keulemans, a highly experienced business and consumer journalist, is published in numerous print and online platforms, writing on topics related to business, lifestyle, and health, with extensive knowledge on the SA retail and wholesale landscape. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in English Literature (British and Commonwealth) and Media Studies and is a member of the Golden Key Honour Society. ann@wilkinsross.co.za

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Note: The value proposal is based on R1.31 per kWh and 40% energy saving. These are averages based on our experience and can be validated per store.

The value benefit

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- Financing options available.

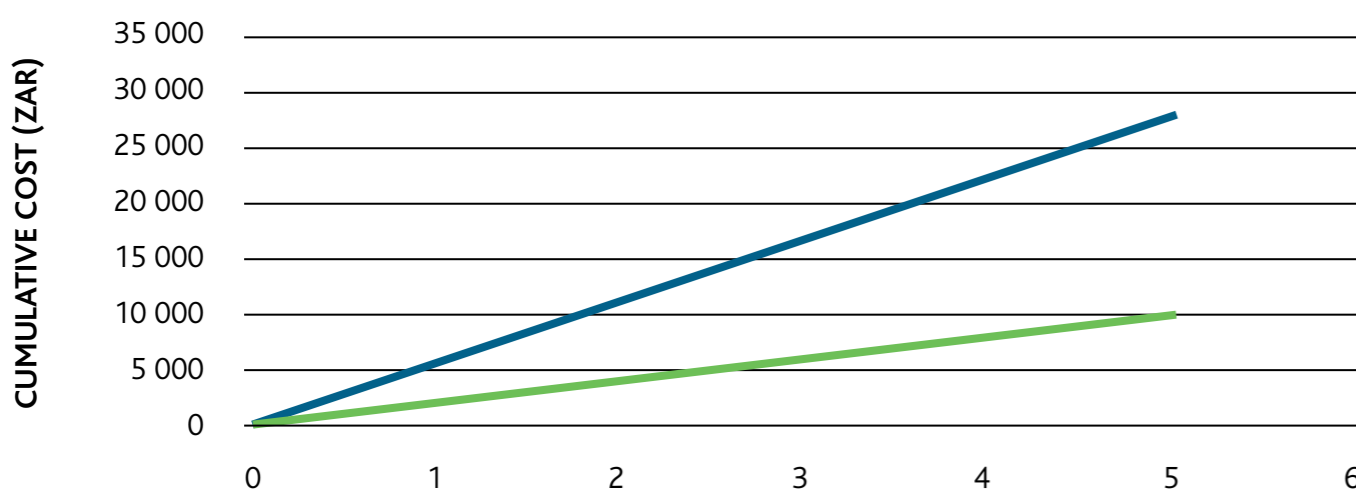
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The Eco Leaf door is 64% more efficient than the standard door. The value proposal is based on R1.31 per kWh and 64% energy saving. These are averages based on our experience and can be validated per store.



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Glacier Standard Door	1,29	230	296.7