

# Foodservice Updates

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## The growth of suburban restaurants brings challenges and possibilities

The pandemic ushered in significant (and seemingly permanent) changes to people's working environments. According to Gallup research, 52 percent of employees in the U.S. work in hybrid offices or at home. This has caused a shift in not only where consumers are eating their meals, but to their eating habits themselves. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce reports that as consumers continue to spend more of their time in their suburban and rural neighborhoods, some restaurants have adjusted their growth plans and followed their guests there. At the same time, this shift to the suburbs has resulted in a broader spread of business throughout the day as opposed to rushes during mealtimes. It can be a disruptive transition. Less people are having take-away lunch at their desks and operators are having to think about keeping dining room space available to people eating at odd hours, as well as to guests coming in with baby strollers. For some, the imbalance of traffic across the day means having to have a mixed-use plan for their real estate that allows them to continue to make sales regardless of the ebb and flow of traffic in a suburban location. Staffing can present another challenge if restaurants are used to sharing workers across multiple urban locations and now have spread-out suburban stores to staff. That said, these locations are experiencing appealing growth – and by becoming a fixture in people's neighborhoods, a business may be more able to become a valuable part of their family and social experiences. There is opportunity to build loyalty and benefit from partnerships with other local businesses that enrich the fabric of the community. If you're investing more in suburban guests right now, what opportunities do you see to boost their experience with you, as well as build their loyalty?





# Tech Talk

## Harness tech for real-time safety monitoring

One little food safety mistake in a restaurant can easily snowball into a bigger one. That's why manual processes can leave so much room for error – and where tech can help keep you on track. Being able to perform daily, digitized audits of your operation helps ensure you can detect problems when they happen. Beyond that, it can pinpoint potential areas for improvement in your food handling practices, sanitation protocols and overall quality control procedures. There are financial benefits too, since these controls can keep your business in compliance and help it avoid the fines that come with regulatory violations. There are cultural benefits for a business too. As a report in Restaurant Technology News explains, your food safety auditing tech can keep your team focused on the same priorities and, should something go wrong, quickly identify if it's about inadequate staff training, a supplier problem, equipment failure or other issue.



# Take steps now to manage indoor heat exposure

If your state is among the many that have experienced major heatwaves so far this year, take note of a new rule in California that may gain traction in other states. The state's Occupational Safety and Health Standards Board recently approved a standard on heat exposure that impacts indoor workplaces. As Restaurant Dive explains, employers who are covered by the new rule must provide their workers with access to clean drinking water and cool-down areas that are located away from radiant heat sources, where workers can sit without touching each other, and where the air temperature is below 82 degrees, unless employers can demonstrate this isn't workable. It's worth noting that workplace demonstrations protesting high kitchen temperatures have occurred in a number of states around the country. Free access to water, adequate air conditioning, and protective equipment that keeps workers cooler can all help improve conditions for workers – both in protecting your restaurant's business culture as well as its food safety.



**#FoodSafety**

# Foodservice CEO

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## Casual dining brands sense an opportunity

A recent report from Fast Casual mentions how Olive Garden and other brands in the casual dining category are carving out opportunities in the current economic environment. Specifically, the experience they offer in relation to quick-service brands is making them a more appealing choice to many consumers – and they are promoting the potential benefits. While quick-service restaurants have struggled to keep prices as low as their guests have come to expect (or have had to shrink portions to contain price spikes), they are meeting with some pushback. A survey of 2000 consumers by LendingTree in May found that 65 percent of consumers had been “shocked” by a high bill in a quick-service restaurant in the past six months. Almost 80 percent consider the food from these restaurants a “luxury” and 62 percent report eating it less. Quick-service brands’ use of dynamic pricing is also making some consumers leery – even though guests could use it to their advantage to get better deals. There is potential here for restaurants across categories to make some changes that can help retain consumers who are questioning the value of restaurant meals right now. Boosting your experience factor is especially important. Using guest data to improve personalization and speed of service, implementing tech to improve your order accuracy, promptly responding to online reviews (and making changes as needed), and treating your team with the care you want them to show to guests can all go far to make the experience you offer feel worthwhile if your menu prices have been climbing.



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