

A Comprehensive Guide for Purchasing Foodservice Equipment

Insights from Marianne Schussler-Yenor, National Sales Manager, Lakeside® Foodservice

I've been in the foodservice industry for over 35 years, and one thing remains clear: foodservice is about more than convenience—it's essential to nutrition, performance, and overall well-being. Architects, consultants, and foodservice teams encounter distinct challenges when designing and outfitting kitchens and cafeterias in K-12 schools, colleges, universities, healthcare facilities, senior living communities, casinos, hotels and other foodservice establishments. How can you ensure operational efficiency while accommodating tight budgets, varying space requirements, and the need for durable, adaptable solutions?

This guide provides an in-depth look at the key considerations foodservice end users, consultants, and architects must take into account when specifying and purchasing foodservice equipment. From choosing versatile designs to prioritizing sustainability, this resource will help you make informed decisions that benefit customers, staff, and the overall community surrounding your operation.

Top Things to Consider When Purchasing Foodservice Equipment

1. Daily Needs and Operation Compatibility

Understanding the daily demands and level of expertise of your foodservice staff can help you align their skills with the complexity of the equipment. Simpler tools are ideal for operations relying on smaller teams, while facilities with trained chefs may benefit from advanced appliances with additional features.

Key considerations include:

- Menu requirements (e.g., bulk vs. à la carte service)
- Storage and preparation needs
- Frequency and duration of use

2. Future-Proofing Your Investment

Facilities should make choices that support long-term goals. Versatility and adaptability ensure your equipment remains functional with evolving menus, population growth, and new operational challenges. Features like adjustable shelves or modular mobile carts can grow with your needs.

3. Size and Capacity

Ensure the equipment fits both your team size and kitchen space. Balancing workload capacity with physical dimensions prevents operational inefficiencies or overcrowding. For example, equipment like **breakfast carts** should be sized to integrate seamlessly within busy entryways or corridors.

4. Manufacturer Reputation

A trusted manufacturer provides peace of mind, consistent support, and reliable warranties. Look for ISO certifications, such as ISO 9001, and positive customer reviews to gauge quality and reliability.

5. Training and Support

Purchasing new equipment is only the beginning. Opt for manufacturers who provide comprehensive training for foodservice staff to optimize usage. Features like user manuals, videos, or on-site demonstrations are invaluable.

6. Warranty and Maintenance

Compare warranty terms and consider extended options, particularly for high-use equipment. Maintenance requirements should be simple and straightforward to minimize downtime.

7. Space and Storing Considerations

Architects and consultants should look at not only the kitchen layout but also the staging areas for portable equipment. Ensuring adequate overnight storage or between-use parking prevents chaotic and unsafe environments.

Addressing Key Challenges in Foodservice Operations

Overcoming Space Constraints

Limited space for mobile carts is a common pitfall. Architects must integrate designated storage zones for meal carts and portable cabinets in the early design phases to prevent cluttered egress corridors.

Simplifying Equipment Movement

Challenge: Heavy portable equipment in large kitchens or corridors.

Solution: Equip kitchens with heavy-duty casters or motorized battery-powered “tugs” to safely and efficiently move multiple cabinets. This reduces physical strain on staff and speeds up processes.

Boosting Breakfast Participation

Strategic placement of breakfast carts near main entrances has proven to boost breakfast participation. By offering grab-and-go options, schools can see participation rates grow drastically, a testament to the value of convenient and mobile serving solutions.

Integrating Sustainability Into Your Purchase

When purchasing foodservice equipment, consider sustainability not just as an environmental responsibility but also as a financial investment. Sustainable practices like reduced packaging, composting, and energy-efficient systems lower operational costs over time.

Starting Your “Go Green” Initiative

Here’s how to commit to sustainability:

- **Assess Waste:** Start by analyzing the waste generated at your loading dock.
- **Localized Sourcing:** Work with local suppliers to reduce transportation emissions.
- **Recycling Stations:** Use dedicated waste and recycling units, like Lakeside Waste Stations, to guide proper customer disposal habits.

- **Efficient Utility Use:** Implement low-flow faucets and energy-saving dishwashing practices to control water and electricity waste.

Final Reminders Before You Purchase

Why Choose Stainless Steel Equipment?

Stainless steel is durable, easy-to-clean, and highly resistant to rust, making it an ideal material for institutional kitchens.

What Are the Benefits of Mobile Carts?

Mobile carts improve workflow and versatility, whether delivering meals, transporting supplies, or offering grab-and-go breakfasts.

How Can Schools Handle Heavy Equipment?

Heavy-duty casters and motorized tugs enable staff to handle large portable appliances without strain.

A Lasting Investment

Purchasing foodservice equipment tailored to your institution's needs is an investment in operational effectiveness, staff satisfaction, and customer nutrition. By addressing key considerations from size and adaptability to sustainability, your operation can deliver exceptional services while minimizing costs. Start implementing these strategies, and see the difference they make! If you're unsure where to start, I'm here to guide you. Contact me today for personalized recommendations on where to get started!

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About The Author:

Marianne Schussler-Yenor is a foodservice equipment expert with over 35 years of experience in primary cooking, holding, prep, storage, display, and transport equipment. Throughout her career, she has collaborated with foodservice representatives, dealers, and operators worldwide to facilitate growth, drive innovation, and enhance operational efficiency. She serves on the Industry Advisory Council for the Association of Nutrition & Foodservice Professionals and the Wisconsin Association of Healthcare Foodservice.

In 2019, she received the MAFSI Pros to Know award for her outstanding contributions to the foodservice equipment industry. In 2018, she became one of the charter members of WESSMA (Women in Equipment & Supply Sales Mentoring Alliance). Today, she is the National Sales Manager for the Sandstone Group, which encompasses the Lakeside®, Geneva, Alluserv®, PrisonBilt®, Made to Drain, and Multiteria™ brands across the U.S. and Canada.