CHAPTER 6

Food Purchasing

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading and studying this chapter, you should be able to:

- Explain the importance of product specifications.
- List and describe the steps for creating a purchasing system.
- Identify factors to consider when establishing par stocks and reordering points.
- Explain selection factors for purchasing meat, produce, canned goods, coffee, and other items.

This chapter covers the basic elements of food purchasing. When setting up a *food-purchasing system*, think in terms of:

- Establishing standards for each food item used (product specification)
- Establishing a system that minimizes effort and losses and maximizes control of theft
- Establishing the amount of each item that should be on hand (par stocks and reorder points)
- Identifying who will do the buying and who will keep the food-purchasing system in motion
- Identifying who will do the receiving, storage, and issuing of items

The dynamics of *purchasing* have changed in several key ways: Restaurants are creating partnerships with a select few purveyors—the rationale being that you get more loyalty and spend less time ordering and receiving multiple times, with some deliveries coming at awkward times. Purveyors say that the freight costs are the same for 1 or 100 boxes.

Sustainable Purchasing

Restaurants are also moving towards buying more locally, cutting down freight costs. Buying locally strengthens regional economies, supports family farms, preserves the local landscape, and fosters a sense of community.[1] However, buying local does not necessarily mean that it is a sustainable product. Sustainability includes buying food as locally as possible, but also involves food production methods that are healthy, do not harm the environment, respect workers, are humane to animals, provide fair wages to farmers, and support farming communities.[2]

A growing number of restaurateurs are increasingly adopting sustainable purchasing practices by purchasing animals that have not been raised in confinement, given antibiotics or hormones, or fed animal byproducts. An example being, avoiding the purchase of chickens and eggs from large factory farms where the chickens are raised in small cages or large overcrowded barns.[3] There are also concerns with the purchasing of fish, by buying only fish that are not endangered limits the variety used in foodservice but helps fish stocks to rebuild their numbers.

Organic food purchasing is gaining momentum. Although more expensive, some operators find their guests are requesting more organic items on the menu. Additionally, there is an increasing demand for health enhancing foods that are rich in antioxidants and phytonurtrients.[4]

Restaurateurs are letting the menu drive business, and many change menus and prices four times a year. Maintaining a close relationship with suppliers helps with advance warnings of pending price increases and lack of availability. For

example, a year ago the price of live cattle was 65 cents a pound. Now it is $1.05 a pound, not slaughtered, trimmed out, or transported. One week the price of tenderloin is up 95 cents a pound over the previous week; the next week, turkey is available at a big discount. If they have fancy menus printed, these changes make it difficult for restaurants to control costs.

Good suppliers are now more like consultants who are interested in your long-term success. They help you purchase the best product for the menu application. For instance, chicken comes in many forms: whole, breast only, four pieces, a quarter, eight pieces plus wings and legs, or thighs separated. The breast comes in various sizes—4 to 10 ounces, randomly; generally two breasts together are less expensive than when separate. The larger the bird, the older and tougher it is.

Freezing techniques have advanced to the point where, for example, fishing boats are out for longer periods—it's too expensive to return to port every night, so they stay out for days or, in some cases, months. With a new process called *flash freezing*, fish are immersed in a liquid chemical that gets them to 265°F so fast that water molecules do not crystallize.

Moreover, prepared products have improved. Guests expect better quality foods, and innovative food processors have responded. For example, frozen chicken rotisserie is a good, consistent quality product that can go on the grill. It is more expensive, but it will reduce labor costs and better control waste.

Vegetables can now be harvested and, within two hours, blanched, frozen, and ready for the cook to prepare for service. They are often more consistent than market price. With salads, items like romaine lettuce can fluctuate in price from $19 to $45 per case. With processed lettuce, you have virtually no labor costs and *know* that you will get 25 salads to a bag and four bags to a box, versus separating and breaking into bite-size pieces and washing the lettuce. Plus, if there is a lot of moisture on the product, the shelf life will be short.

It's all a question of knowing what's available, when it's available, and at what price. So, planning a menu should begin by consulting with a supplier.

The National Restaurant Association's Foodservice Purchasing Managers Executive Study Group offers useful purchasing recommendations: a reduction in the number of suppliers and a move to partnering with them. This increases information on markets and aids in forecasting future supply availability and price movements. This is one strategy to beat the market; however, it is still crucial to define market prices accurately. One of the best ways to accomplish this is to negotiate a long-term contract (annual, at a fixed cost, with downside protection if feasible). Suppliers for some perishable items may be invited to bid on a range of items for a week or a month. This process allows the restaurateur to control the process. Primarily composed of chain personnel, The National Restaurant Association's Foodservice Purchasing Managers Executive Study Group is also open to NRA members who specialize in purchasing at independent foodservice operations and who carry a purchasing title.[5]

Standards for food (food specifications) are set, preferably in writing, before a restaurant opens. The amounts to purchase are based on a forecast of sales, which,

A supplier, chef, and manager in discussion over new menu suggestions
Courtesy of Sysco

without a sales history, is admittedly a guesstimate. Here, previous experience with a similar kind of restaurant is most valuable.

The same procedures are followed for buying other supplies—paper goods, cleaning materials, glassware, and so on. Purveyors are contacted, credit is established, and the food is received and stored.

When in operation, *par stocks* (the reasonable amount to have on hand) and *reorder points* (the stock points that indicate more should be ordered) are established. Figure 6.1 illustrates the steps in putting together a food-purchasing system. Figure 6.2 shows the detail that Red Lobster goes into for the product specification of one type of shrimp.

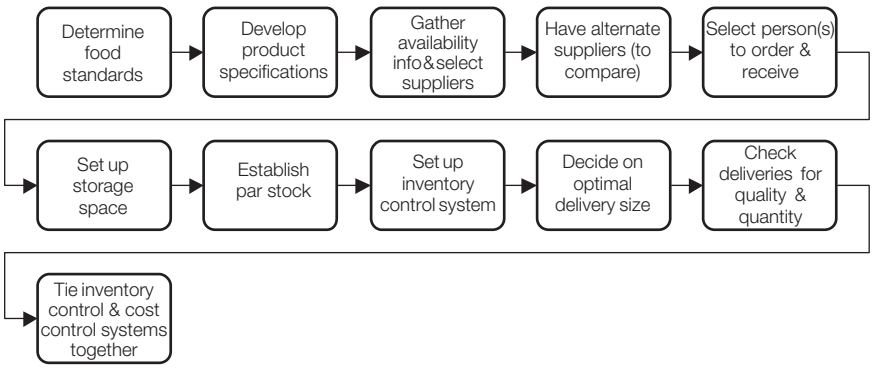

FIGURE 6.1: Steps in putting together a food-purchasing system

Food-Purchasing System

Purchasing can be thought of as a subsystem within the total restaurant system, which, once installed can be set in motion, repeating itself. There are 11 steps in putting together a purchasing system.

1. Based on the menu, determine the food standard(s) required to serve the market. Will vegetables be canned, fresh, or frozen? What cut and grade of meat is appropriate for each meat item on the menu? Will fish be fresh or frozen, or some of both?
2. Develop product specifications—detailed descriptions of what is wanted based on consultation and best information available—and place responsibility for product consistency and quality on the supplier.
3. Gather product availability information and select supplier(s) based on reliability of service, price, and honesty. Obtain samples of the food and test them in order to select the best.
4. Have alternate suppliers in mind for comparison.
5. Select person(s) to order and receive supplies, and give him/her (them) authority to reject delivery of individual items. Make sure that the person ordering is different from the person receiving and that management authorizes or places each order, even for meat and other perishables.
6. Set up storage spaces for maximum utilization.
7. Establish the amount needed to be stocked (par stock) for each item.
8. Set up an inventory control system.
9. Decide on optimal delivery size to reduce cost of delivery and handling.
10. Check all deliveries for quality and quantity or weight.
11. Tie inventory control and cost control systems together.

Product Name: Shrimp, Cooked, Shell-on, Headless, USA Concept: RL

DRI Product Code: **1063**

1. *Product Definition:*

   IQF (Individually Quick Frozen), clean, wholesome, shell-on shrimp, of the acceptable commercial species. The finished cooked, shell-on product shall be produced from first quality raw material. The raw material shall be treated with a solution of 92 percent chilled water, 4 percent Carnal 659 S and 4 percent salt for one hour.

   Product shall be in compliance with all aspects of the United States Food and Drug Administration Seafood HACCP (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points) regulation 21 Code of Federal Regulations 123.

   This product shall be of food grade and in all respects, including labeling, in compliance with the Federal Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act of 1938, as amended, and all applicable regulations there under.

   This product shall be processed and packed under strict sanitary conditions and shall be free from all forms of foreign and extraneous matter, in accordance with FDA current Good Manufacturing Practices.

2. *Sensory Attributes:*

   The appearance, odor, and flavor shall be that of freshly caught and processed shrimp. The texture of the shrimp shall be moist, firm, and tender. There shall be no objectionable flavors (Muddy, Geosmin, Earthy, etc.) in the product. The product shall have no extraneous or off odors, flavors or colors.

3. Physical Requirements:

   A. Net Weight: The net weight shall not be less than the declared net weight when inspected in the U.S.

   B. Count per pound: The average count per pound shall fall within the declared count range. The finished count range shall be 40–80 with an average of 63 per lot/shipment. No individual sample shall exceed 67.

   C. Sulfiting Agents: There shall be less than 100 parts per million residual sodium bisulfite in the shrimp meat as tested by an official procedure recognized by the U.S. States Food and Drug Administration.

   D. Cooked Evaluation Process:

      D.1. Methodology: Take 10 pieces of randomly selected shrimp per sample bag and place them in a bag with a small amount of water. Seal the bag and place the bag in boiling water to warm the cooked shrimp.

      D.2. Sensory Evaluation:

         D.2.1. Smell: When opening the product, smell the bag and the individual shrimp for the following extraneous or off odors and flavors:

            D.2.1.1. moderate to strong Geosmin, i.e. muddy/grassy
            D.2.1.2. sour, ammonia
            D.2.1.3. fecal, putrid
            D.2.1.4. petroleum, diesel
            D.2.1.5. chemical

         D.2.2. Taste: for all of the above objectionable flavors
         D.2.3. Texture: The texture shall not be mushy (powdery), rubbery (crunchy), stringy (stale).

   E. Uniformity of Size: The uniformity of size shall range from 1.4–2.4.

$$\textbf{Uniformity Ratio} = \frac{\textbf{Weight of 15 largest shrimp}}{\textbf{Weight of 15 smallest shrimp}}$$

   F. Defects: Total defects are the total amount of major and minor defects in each lot, not to exceed 15 percent. It is further understood that there is to be no intentional packaging of defective product.

FIGURE 6.2: Example of a food product specification

Courtesy of Red Lobster

Critical Defects: There is no tolerance for Critical Defects. The three types of Critical Defects are:

Sensory Attributes: Any of the defects listed in sections 3.D.2.1 through 3.D.2.3 constitutes a Critical Defect.

Foreign Material: The product shall be free from processing debris and all forms of foreign material that can pose a food hazard or safety issue, i.e., metal fragments, glass, insects.

Microbiological Results (See Microbiological requirements Section 4)

Major Defects: Any major defect should not exceed 3 percent. Rejection of the production code will occur if the sum of the major defects or the only major defect exceeds 5 percent. Examples:

1. Melanosis — black spot on the meat
2. Brown Meat — Due to disease or enzymatic reaction around the neck meat.
3. Unusable Shrimp — Unusable (pieces and broken) shrimp.

Minor Defects: Any minor defect should not exceed 5 percent by weight of the shrimp, except chipped tails, missing tails, and black spot on shell. The amount of chipped tails and shrimp with missing tails (boat run only) should not exceed 10 percent by weight provided the chipped tails are not shorter than the middle dorsal ridge. The amount of black spot on the shell should not exceed 8 percent by weight. Examples:

1. Throat meat — Throat meat should be no longer than one-half of the length of the first segment. Rejection occurs at the length of the 1st segment.
2. Tail rot and black tail — When two tail panels are affected and/or two-thirds of the panels are black.
3. Black spot on shell — melanosis on the shell.
4. Soft tail — Any tail that is too soft to maintain its integrity through the production cycle in U.S.
5. Chipped tails/Missing tails (boat run only) — The product is Individually Quick Frozen (IQF), and during freezing, the tail is fragile and is susceptible to breakage.

A. Dehydration: There shall be no dehydration in the product.

B. Decomposition: There shall be no decomposition in the product.

FIGURE 6.2: (*continued*)

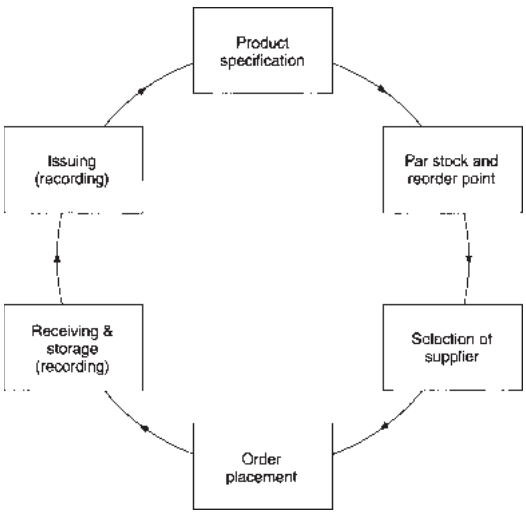

FIGURE 6.3: Purchasing cycle

PURCHASING CYCLE

A purchasing cycle can be set up that rolls along efficiently, a system that repeats itself day after day with minimal demands on the operator (see Figure 6.3). Even though under constant review, each part of the cycle is changed slowly, only as customers and menu change and as new products and purveyors are considered. Product specifications need only be reviewed, not reset, each time food is ordered. Par stock and reorder points are relatively fixed and change only as sales volume changes appreciably or as the menu changes. (Product specifications and par stock are explained in detail later.) Major suppliers are changed infrequently. Receiving, issuing, and recording are carried out systematically, and the information becomes the basic data for the cost control system.

WHO SETS UP THE SYSTEM? WHO OPERATES IT?

In the usual restaurant, the manager, in consultation with the chef and other key people, decides on product specification, selects purveyors, and has a rough figure in mind for par stock and reorder point. It is recommended that one person, and one person only, who has a clear understanding of food cost control and of the restaurant market, should set up and operate the food-purchasing system. That person is usually the manager. Too often it is a nonowner chef with purveyor friends who get the orders and charge high prices. Experienced restaurant operators do not let a purveyor "par up" the restaurant. Purveyors are in the business of selling food, beverages, and related items to restaurants and will likely attempt to create a partnership with you.

FOOD QUALITY STANDARDS

Standards for food quality are set to serve a particular market. The standards required for a particular restaurant or chain is determined by the owner and chef/cook in a small restaurant or a group of interested stakeholders in a chain. Quality relates to value in that a higher quality product will provide the guest with increased satisfaction over a lower quality product.

Some operators serve fresh fish only, never frozen. If fresh fish is unavailable, no fish is served at all. Some restaurants use only fresh vegetables. Others use all frozen. Others use canned vegetables. A chain of highly successful dinner houses specifies that all items be breaded to order and deep-fried at once. No frozen breaded items are used. This chain believes that the quality of frozen items is lower than items breaded by hand and cooked immediately.

BUYING BY SPECIFICATION

Although many restaurants do not spell out in detail a specification for each food item purchased, the specification is usually well outlined in the operator's mind. Each operation needs a quality of food that fits its market. The quality needed varies with the market and also with the food item being produced. Canned vegetables used in a made-up dish need not be of fancy grade. Meat for grinding into hamburger may well come from U.S. good or even lower-graded meat and still be satisfactory. Canned beef may be satisfactory for deli (thinly) sliced sandwiches. Apples for use in apple pie need not be of the same quality as those to be eaten out of hand, where appearance is important.

It might be expected that buying by grade alone would be sufficient to assure the quality desired. Not so. Canned vegetables, for example, vary considerably within a grade because of different growing conditions experienced in one part of the country as compared with another. Most large foodservice operations conduct can-cutting tests annually, after the fruit and vegetable crops have been harvested and canned. The operator wants not only to know the unit cost but to compare the color, texture, taste, and uniformity of products.

HOW MUCH INVENTORY?

Every food item has a shelf life—the length of time it can be stored without appreciable loss in quality or weight. Nearly every food that contains a large amount of water shrinks with storage. Even under ideal refrigeration of −20°F, ice cream shrinks. Consider also the dollars tied up in *inventory*, which represents money that draws no interest and does no work for the enterprise. There should be no more inventory than what is actually needed to cover the operation from one delivery date to another.

This target cannot be realized if the operation has delivery problems or is some distance from a source of food materials.

The temptation is to buy a large quantity when a price reduction is available—which may be fine for liquor, where little is affected by storage—but this requires extra handling space and time for most items. Some storerooms have been seen to hold as much as a year's supply of canned fruit merely because a salesperson convinced the food buyer that the fruit was a good buy or that the buyer would receive a prize or gift certificate for the purchase.

Par Stock and Reorder Point A food-purchasing system calls for a par stock and a reorder point for each food item. These are based on quantities used, storage space available, and availability of the product. A steak house may have a policy of ordering meat once a week and base the order size on forecasted sales for the upcoming week. Milk may be delivered twice a week, based on a standing order. Fresh produce may be delivered every other day.

When it comes to the par stock for canned foods, the amount that is considered a safe inventory may be ordered only when the supply is down to a specified amount, such as one case—the reorder point. Management may wish never to have more than one case of a certain wine on hand and will order only when down to the last two bottles. A fast-moving item may require 10 cases as par stock.

Par Stock Based on Preprepared Foods The operator with a fixed menu has an advantage in buying. Prepreparation of entrées can be done in terms of prepared items—so many trays stored under refrigeration. At the Pump Room in Chicago, which has been an institution since 1938, the entrance is lined with hundreds of photos of celebrities who have dined there over the years. The restaurant serves fine American cuisine and is noted for its prime rib and roasted duck. Its par stock calculations are based on the previous quarter's numbers. One beef rib is preprepared for each 60 expected guests and 10 ducks for each 100 guests. The figure fluctuates on holidays and in winter.

In a restaurant where several items are preprepared and stored, purchasing can be based on the par stock of preprepared and stored items, not on raw food in the refrigerator or freezer, where inventory control is tighter. The savvy restaurant operator will call vendors frequently, even daily, because prices vary considerably. Fresh vegetables, meat, and fish are good examples of items on which to get frequent price quotations, especially in a high-volume restaurant.

MECHANICS OF ORDERING

Opinions vary as to the best way to place orders for food and supplies. Some experts recommend calling for competitive prices before ordering anything. This is time-consuming. It may also pit the supplier against the operator, and the supplier eventually passes on the excessive costs of making small deliveries to the operator. Other operators deal only with one or two trusted suppliers. Still others get much of their food at local supermarkets.

In many instances, a restaurant operator pays as much or more than the casual shopper does for a product. The supplier has the cost of delivery to the door and, usually, the cost of providing credit and other service, which must be recouped if the supplier is to stay in business.

The standing order is a predetermined order that is filled regularly—so much milk per day, so much bread, and so on. The standing order can vary with the day of the week. On Monday, so much milk is delivered; on Tuesday, so much additional milk; and so on.

Large restaurants have a more formal purchasing system that includes a purchase order. This is a form with three or four copies; one or two copies go to the supplier, one of which accompanies the delivery. The buyer keeps a copy for company files. A fourth copy may be kept by the person doing the receiving in the restaurant. Storage is discussed in Chapter 9.

Types of Purchasing

BUYING FROM FULL-LINE PURVEYORS

Most of the populated areas of the United States have food distributors such as Sysco. These distributors carry a large line of the supplies and foods needed by a restaurateur, which makes for one-stop shopping. The full-line distributor can offer more than product in the usual sense, providing merchandise and promotional material and training in the use of certain products and preparation of some foods. Buying from a full-line distributor saves the operator time in placing and receiving orders. Most of the larger distributors use computers for receiving online orders and simplified billing procedures. The large full-line distributors specify certain amounts for orders, which a specialized distributor may not require. One-stop buying eliminates the need for daily shopping but does not completely eliminate the need for price comparison. Companies like Sysco do a weekly exotic fruit and vegetable list called *The Market Report*. For example, 22 types of tomatoes are available at various times of year.

Storage at the Prado restaurant. Marking the product with date and contents is important

Portion cut pork loin chops

Courtesy of Sysco

CO-OP BUYING

Another type of distribution that can be found in many areas is co-op buying. The co-op management agrees to supply products at cost plus enough of a markup to cover the cooperative's cost. A co-op is a nonprofit institution that is able to provide restaurant food and supplies at a lower cost than the profit-oriented purveyors.

BEWARE

Avoid aligning yourself with a supplier, who, in turn, has suppliers who are not certified by quality inspectors. Specialty foods are often produced by newcomers to food processing who are not aware of the dangers of food contamination and the real possibility of transmitting serious diseases via food. All food processors in this country are subject to health regulations, including periodic health inspections. However, the quality and frequency of such inspections vary widely from one state to another, and a small meat packer or processor of specialty foods such as tofu may be in violation for months or even years before discrepancies are found and corrected. For example, raw peanuts are subject to a fungus growth called aflatoxin that can permanently damage the liver. Without proper inspection of equipment, peanuts and peanut butter can reach the market contaminated in one form or another without anyone knowing it.

One small food-processing plant that we visited—a tofu plant—used old diapers in place of fresh cheesecloth, and mouse droppings were casually brushed off a strainer that was then used without further sanitizing. A visit to any small food processor soliciting your trade may pay for itself.

Buying Meat

Because meat is the most costly food item in most restaurants, it deserves the most thought in drawing up food specifications. Fortunately, the federal government, through the *United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)*, provides a great deal of information about all commonly purchased meat. Other useful information is available from the National Livestock and Meat Board, headquartered in Chicago.

A steak and lobster tail dinner
Courtesy of PhotoDisc, Inc.

Principal factors in meat buying are the cut of the meat (what part of the animal), the USDA grade of the meat (its fat content, tenderness, and cost), and the style (its form: carcass, wholesale cut, or ready-to-serve portion). Restaurant patrons (the market), through the menu and price, mostly determine the best kind of beef to buy. A high style of beef house may need loins from which to cut and age prime steaks. A hamburger house may need grass-fed beef. Both operators must satisfy their patrons. Meat may also

be purchased locally, a more sustainable approach. The restaurant Bethany's Table in Portland, Oregon, is now purchasing whole steers that are raised by small lot farmers and butchered in small USDA approved local shops. At $1 per pound on the hoof, $2 per pound hanging weight, $2.50 per pound cut and wrapped, it's worth a try.[6]

PURCHASING MEAT[7]

Given that meat is one of the more expensive menu items, we need to make our purchasing decisions carefully. Beef, veal, pork, or lamb are frequently used on restaurant menus. They are prepared using a variety of cooking methods according to guest preferences. Operators can save money and reduce by using a lower meat grade from an older, tougher, but more flavorful animal when a moist heat cooking method is used.

Beef can be purchased as a *side of beef*, which, as the name suggests, is half a cow that can then be butchered into the desired cuts. This may work for some larger and some high-end restaurants, where butchering meat is making a comeback. The advantage is that cutting the meat fresh costs less than prebutchered meats. The disadvantage is that once the desired cuts have been removed, the remaining carcass needs to be dealt with. Many other restaurants use *selected cuts* of meat either fresh or frozen; that way they don't have to pay a butcher or devote space for butchering; they simply find it more efficient to order exactly what they want fresh or frozen.

The *As Purchased* (AP) has a price spread for a *portion cut* that needs nothing more than cooking. The AP price for the *wholesale cut* such as a whole loin, which can be butchered into sirloin steaks obviously coats less than a portion cut and more than a *side of beef*. The federal government has set standards of identity for meat products. Meat buyers should use the *Institutional Meat Purchase Specifications (IMPS)* numbering system for meat items. These numbers take the part of a meat specification. For example, if a restaurant orders a 1112 ribeye steak, it will get a particular style and trim. All the specifications and numbers are listed in the *Meat Buyer's Guide (MBG)*, published by the National Association of Meat Processors Association (NAMP). This is very helpful for restaurants as they can simply order by the number.

GOVERNMENT INSPECTION AND GRADES OF MEAT

The inspection of meat for wholesomeness has been mandatory since 1907. Federal inspection falls under the jurisdiction of the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS). The main inspection system the FSIS uses is the Hazard Analysis of Critical Control Point (HACCP) described in Chapter 9. Meat that passes the rigorous United States Department of Agriculture inspection is marked with a federal inspection stamp. A quality grading system exists for beef, lamb, pork, and veal; the grades are:

1. *Prime*: The best product available. Tender and very juicy. Contains 8 to 10 percent fat and the animal has been grain fed for 180 days.

2. *Choice*: Contains at least 5 percent fat. Three levels: high, medium, and low. Choice is similar to prime, although the animal has been grain fed for 150 days, for medium 120 days, and low 90 days.
3. *Select:* A very lean product. Contains 4 percent fat. Sometimes referred to as "grass-fed beef." This grade is popular in supermarkets. It is a low-cost item and is more healthful than higher-quality grades. But it lacks flavor.
4. *Standard:* Similar to select. But it is even less juicy and tender.
5. *Commercial:* Beef from older cattle. It is especially lacking in tenderness. Usually dairy cows receive this quality grade. Because of the animal's age at the time of slaughter, some of the meat may be quite flavorful.

Lamb quality grades are based primarily on the color, texture, and firmness of the flesh; the proportion of meat to bone; and the amount and quality of the "feathering," which is the fat streaking in the ribs and the fat streaking in the inside flank muscles. The grades for lamb are: prime, choice, good, and utility.

Pork quality grades are almost exclusively based on yield. The most important consideration is the amount of finish, especially as it relates to color, firmness, and texture. Feathering is also an important consideration. Grain-fed pork make better-quality products, which are far superior to those animals that are given other types of feeds. The quality grades for pork are: No. 1, No. 2, No. 3, No. 4, and Utility. If fresh pork is used on the menu it is far better to use No. 1 or No. 2 quality grades only.

Veal quality grades are based on the color, texture, and firmness of the flesh; proportion of meat to bone; quality and firmness of the finish; and amount and quality of feathering. High-quality veal will have a pink color and smooth flesh. The quality grades for veal are: Prime, Choice, Good, Standard, Utility, and Cull. Prime and choice are intended for restaurant use.

BUYING AND RECEIVING MEAT

The *first step* in buying meat is to get a copy of the Meat Buyer's Guide (MBG).

Then, *step two* is to determine exactly what meat the restaurant needs. Fresh meats are selected on the basis of U.S. grades and IMPS numbers, while processed convenience items are typically selected on the basis of packers' brands. It is always wise to prepare specifications for each item. Representatives for major suppliers like Sysco or U.S. Foods can help prepare specifications.

Step three is to request bids for the purchase specifications. This is done by asking for quotes from purveyors. Bids are normally for three to six months in the future. Buyers also consider the reputation of the purveyor based on dependability and service.

The receiving and storage of meat are an important part of the restaurant food system. If, as with most restaurants, there is no scale at the receiving dock, then there should be one inside the kitchen to weigh and check the meat. Some operators actually check the meat inside the cooler to keep it in good condition. The question of who should check it in is up to the owner but a manager is better

than the chef or jointly to reduce the possibility of pilferage and collusion. In any event, the meat should be checked for freshness, an example being a cherry red color for beef and a pleasant smell. If the color is a darker red and there is an unpleasant odor then the meat is old. Pork is difficult to check for odor because it deteriorates from the inside out, not the outside in.

The receiver should check the temperature of the meat, which should be 40°F, minimally, for fresh and 0°F, minimally, for frozen meat. Then look for weight, count, and sizes. Remember to only weigh the actual piece of meat not the container or packing materials.

Fresh meat should be stored at a temperature of 35° to 40°F and in a meat refrigerator separated from cooked meats. Frozen meats should be stored at −10°F. Meats should be dated and rotated when being used.

Buying Fresh Fruits and Vegetables

According to the National Restaurant Association's "What's Hot" 2010 survey, the number-one trend among chefs was buying local produce. According to the survey, 89 percent of fine-dining operators serve locally sourced items, and 9 in 10 believe demand for locally sourced items will grow in their segment in the future. Almost 3 in 10 quick-service operators serve locally sourced items. Close to half believe the items will grow more popular in the future. Seventy percent of those surveyed say they are more likely to visit a restaurant that offers locally produced food items.[8]

Many operators, especially those with higher-priced menus, feature fresh fruits and vegetables. If these are really fresh and cooked minimally, they taste better than frozen or canned fruit. The cost of purchase and preparation is also higher. Ever since Lorenzo Delmonico, name restaurateurs have made a point of ferreting out the finest produce possible, often visiting the wholesale market early in the day or buying from a small farmer who specializes in certain fruits or vegetables. The proprietor of one French restaurant features tiny zucchini fresh daily when in season. Many operators, including a few chain operators, feature fresh strawberries year-round, even though they must be imported from Mexico, New Zealand, and Chile.

Restaurants with lower-priced menus are likely to feature fruit that is in season. The most popular fruits—apples, bananas, and oranges—are available year-round. Figure 6.4, prepared by the USDA, shows what to look for in fresh vegetables. Local vegetables may be bought at local farmers' markets, some grocery stores, and the local farms themselves. The group *Community Supported Agriculture* has become a popular way to buy local, seasonal food directly from a farmer. A farmer offers a certain number of "shares" to the public. Typically the share consists of a box of vegetables, but other products from the farm may be included. Interested consumers purchase a share and in return receive the seasonal produce each week throughout the farming season. Not only do you get fresh vegetables, but you get to develop a relationship with the farmer who grows your food and learn more about how food is grown.[9]

ASPARAGUS

Purchase Units:

Cartons	15-16 pounds
Pyramid Crates	30-32 pounds

Select firm, crisp, smooth, and clean spears with compact tips and good green color extending down near the base. Spears which are ridged, crooked, or have spread tips or excessive amounts of white at base are likely to be tough.

Watch For: Wilted, flabby spears or mushy condition of tips which indicate age and have objectionable flavor

AVOCADOS

Purchase Units:

Cartons and Flats	12-15 pounds

Select avocados having a fresh, bright appearance, heavy, medium-size, fairly firm or just beginning to soften. Irregular light brown markings on the skin have no effect on the flesh.

Watch For: Dark, sunken spots may merge and form irregular patches. If the surface is deeply cracked or broken, this is an indication of decay.

BEANS, GREEN OR WAX

Purchase Units:

Baskets	bushel	28-30 pounds
	½ bushel	14-15 pounds
Crates	bushel	28-30 pounds
Cartons		28-30 pounds

Select young, tender, well-formed beans which are free from blemishes and are fresh and crisp. Look for bright color in either green or yellow podded varieties. Beans should snap or break in two pieces before bending double.

Watch For: Wilted and dry beans which are signs of aging after picking, resulting in poor flavor. Older beans with enlarged seeds which are likely to be tough and fibrous.

BROCCOLI

Purchase Units:

Crates	4/5 bushel	15-20 pounds
Crates, Wirebound		20 pounds
Baskets	8 quarts	6 pounds
Cartons	14 bunches	20-23 pounds

Select bunches having a deep green color, compact firm surface with small individual buds, and fresh appearance.

Watch For: Soft, slippery, watersoaked spots or irregular brown spots which are signs of decay. Heads which are spreading, wilted, turning yellow or have many enlarged flower buds are old and probably will have an off-flavor.

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

Purchase Units:

Wooden Drums		25 pounds
Flats	12 10-ounce cups	7½ to 8 ounces per cup
Cartons		25 pounds

Select sprouts having fresh, bright green color, tight fitting and firm outer leaves.

Watch For: Sprouts with yellow or otherwise discolored leaves or sprouts which are soft, open or wilted. Small holes or ragged leaves may indicate worm damage

CABBAGE

Purchase Units:

Crates	1 3/5 bushels	50-55 pounds
Cartons		45-50 pounds
Mesh Sacks		50-60 pounds

Select well-trimmed heads having green, fresh outer leaves and heads which are firm and heavy for their size, free from signs of insects and bad blemishes. Stock out of storage is usually lacking in green color, but may be otherwise satisfactory.

FIGURE 6.4: What to look for in fresh vegetables

When selecting fruits and vegetables personally, these guidelines apply:

- Select freshly picked, mature items and use them as quickly as possible. This especially applies to such items as sweet corn, which begins losing sugars (they change to other carbohydrates) once it is picked. Vitamin loss also begins with picking. Some fruits, such as avocados and bananas, are

picked early and ripened later. Other fruits, such as pineapples, do not ripen after they are picked.
- Handle fruits and vegetables as little as possible to avoid bruising.
- Distinguish between blemishes that affect only appearance and those that affect eating quality.
- Check on maturity of items.
- Avoid vegetables and fruits that are overripe or show decay.
- Be conscious of size and count. Use off sizes when possible; they may be better buys.
- Know sizes of containers and check on their contents. Watch for loose or short packs, or packs with one quality on top and another on the bottom.

Most operators are unable to visit wholesale markets personally and rely on distributors for delivery. Grade standards can be used. The USDA maintains inspection services at principal shipping points and terminal markets and has developed these standards. They are helpful, but because of rapid perishability of produce, it is difficult to rely on grades alone. The buyer specifies grade, size, count, container size, and degree of ripeness. Local food is fresher and tastes better than food shipped long distances from other states or countries. Local farmers can offer produce varieties bred for taste and freshness rather than for shipping and long shelf life.[10]

According to the Environmental Defense Fund and Restaurant Associates' (a New York City–based foodservice) Green Dining Best Practices, when sourcing produce you should follow these practices:

- Go organic. Organic produce meets USDA standards if it is grown without synthetic pesticides or fertilizers.
- Go seasonal. Where and when a food is grown has a significant impact on its environmental footprint.
- Buy imported produce with credentials. When what you are looking for is not available locally, buy those certified by a credible third party that can vouch for environmentally friendly growing practices.
- Reduce transport greenhouse gases. Buying from local farms reduces transport distances. Look to buy from those that choose the most efficient modes of transportation.[11]

USDA WHOLESALE PRODUCE GRADES

Grade standards are necessarily broad. Fruits and vegetables differ widely in quality, according to type and growing conditions. Federal standards must have broad tolerances to encompass all the variations. A set of fruit and vegetable *grade standards* is available from the Fruit and Vegetable Division, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250. The grades and standards follow.

- *U.S. Fancy:* This grade applies to highly specialized produce, a very small percentage of the total crop. This grade is rarely used on most commodities because it is too costly to pack.

- *U.S. No. 1:* This grade is the most widely used grade in trading produce from farm to market and indicates good average quality.
- *U.S. Commercial:* This grade applies to produce inferior to U.S. No. 1 but superior to U.S. No. 2.
- *U.S. Combination:* This grade applies to produce that combines percentages of U.S. No. 1 and U.S. No. 2.
- *U.S. No. 2:* This grade applies to what is usually considered the lowest quality practical to ship. Produce of this grade usually has much poorer appearance and more waste than U.S. No. 1.
- *U.S. No. 3:* This grade applies to produce used for highly specialized products.

Small supermarket chains may offer produce at prices below vendor prices because their buyers pick and choose relatively small lots of produce in which the large chains are not interested. Restaurants also can feature produce sold as loss leaders in supermarkets. The quality of fruit that is to be used in soup or chopped up in a fresh fruit cup need not be the same as that offered raw or on a fresh fruit plate. Premium-size produce need not be purchased when it is to be cut up. Celery for soup or watermelon for fresh fruit cup are examples.

Some soup bases contain more salt than anything else; salt is cheaper by the pound.

Salt (sodium chloride), the most widely used flavor additive to food in the world, has many values — when used in moderation. Americans, however, generally use too much. Less than 1/2 teaspoon a day satisfies the daily current salt requirement. Yet Americans typically consume 3 1/2 teaspoons each day.

If a little is needed, why use a lot? Overuse can damage the kidneys, interfere with nutrient absorption, and contribute to high blood pressure. Excessive salt intake sets up people with heart disease for congestive heart failure.

Most canned and bottled products contain too much salt. For example, a 10-ounce can of chicken broth contains almost 1,000 milligrams of salt.

CANNED FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

A great deal of information is available about canned fruits and vegetables, much of it developed by the USDA and by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Quality standards and the standard of fill of container are concerns of the FDA. The FDA also requires labeling on most food items containing several ingredients. The common or usual names of all ingredients, listed in descending order of their presence by weight, must be on the container. Some products turn out to be mostly filler. All foods shipped interstate come under the jurisdiction of the FDA. State and city laws regulate items produced and sold within the states, but most of these laws resemble the federal laws.

Some coffee vendors offer to train restaurant employees in coffee brewing and may clean the coffee brewing machine periodically at no charge. Aficionados of coffee are legion, and many agree that the brew should be held at a temperature of 185°F for no longer than 30 minutes.

Operators who frequently use canned fruits or vegetables perform can-cutting tests, usually in the late fall, after the picking season. In these tests, labels on cans from various vendors are covered, and the contents are graded for taste, texture, color, uniformity, price, and size. They can also be compared as to how well the contents hold up on a steam table. An important comparative measure is drained weight. The results of these tests are often surprising: The less expensive products may turn out to be superior.

Selecting the Right Coffee

Like everything else on the menu, the coffee must fit the clientele. The operator's choice may not be that of the market being served. Preferences vary around the country, and people tend to like the coffee with which they grew up. Widely traveled people often move toward a stronger coffee with a heavier roast.

Coffee served in restaurants is a blend, with mountain-grown coffees predominating. Probably the best way to select coffee is to serve it to a taste panel of typical patrons and use the one they choose.

Generally speaking, coffees are divided between the robust, heavy-flavored coffees and the lighter, milder, mountain-grown coffees. Two separate coffees from a small country may differ widely. The degree of roast and the manner in which the coffee is brewed have a marked effect on the final flavor. It is not enough merely to buy the most expensive coffee.

Coffee vendors often supply the restaurant operator with a coffee-making machine on a no-cost lease basis provided the operator agrees to buy all of his or her coffee from the vendor. Sometimes the vendor charges a few cents more per pound of coffee—which, over time, pays for the machine. For a beginning restaurateur who is short of capital, such offers are welcomed. (Ice cream cabinets are often provided on a similar basis.)

According to the Environmental Defense Fund and Restaurant Associates coffee totals $70 billion in restaurant sales each year. Some growers are using mass production methods using an excess of chemicals and pesticides. These chemicals end up polluting waterways and harm wildlife habitats. More sustainable means of growing coffee beans does exists. The Environmental Defense Fund and Restaurant Associates' Green Dining Best Practices suggests restaurants buy their coffee from credible suppliers that are Rainforest Alliance Certified (this certification ensures sustainable farm management, conservation of natural habitat, and responsible pest control). You can further ensure sustainability by buying coffee labeled organic.[12]

Summary

Successful foodservice operators establish standards of food quality that please the clientele served. They also establish a purchasing system that helps ensure that the food is purchased, stored, and accounted for so that theft, waste, and

overproduction are minimized. The National Restaurant Association research has shown that sustainable practices are significant factors to today's consumers when choosing a restaurant. Forty-four percent say they are likely to make a restaurant choice based on a restaurant's efforts to conserve energy and water. Six out of 10 say they are more likely to visit a restaurant that offers food that was grown in an organic or environmentally friendly way.[13]

Basic to such a system is the establishment of food standards appropriate to the kinds of customers served and the prices that can be charged to achieve a profit. The percentage of fat in the hamburger, the size of the fried egg, the ingredients in the milkshake, and the grade of meat in the steak are examples of the information needed to establish food standards. The standards are expressed in terms of food specifications used in ordering and monitoring food purchases.

In independent restaurants, the responsibility for food purchasing usually rests with the manager. Standards and specifications are set at headquarters for chain operations. Purchasing controls are necessarily tight because theft is a strong possibility. Collusion among vendors, managers, and employees happens. It is wise to keep storeroom keys tightly controlled by issuing them to only one or a few people.

Receiving and storage practices are spelled out. Canned and dried goods can be stored so that the most frequently used items are easiest to get.

Items that must be refrigerated or frozen are kept in separate locations.

Government standards for such items as meat, fish, and poultry can be used in establishing the standards used by the restaurant. For restaurants that use a lot of canned goods, annual can-cutting tests that compare brands of canned goods for quality and price are useful. Several examples of food specifications are given. Inventory control—the amount of food to be ordered and stocked—can be built into the purchasing system by reference to past records. Excessive inventories tie up capital and space and lead to food waste. Establishing reorder points (when to reorder specific items) and par stocks (amounts normally stocked) are part of a purchasing system.

The number of vendors used in a policy matter is based on the reliability, prices, and trustworthiness of the vendor(s). In larger towns and cities, reliance on full-line purveyors may save time and money. Some vendors offer training for restaurant personnel in dish machine use and coffee brewing, for example.

A *food-purchasing system* includes periodic review of current buying practices and customer preferences and a readiness to change any part of the system as necessary.

Key Terms and Concepts

Side of beef
Selected cuts
Portion cut
Wholesale cut
Institutional Meat Purchase Specifications (IMPS)
Meat Buyer's Guide
Food-purchasing system

Food specification/standards
Inventory
Par stock
Reorder point
USDA wholesale produce grades

Review Questions

1. Explain the statement "The quality of food served must fit the clientele of the restaurant."
2. Define *par stock* and *reorder point*.
3. How will you select the coffee to be served in your restaurant?
4. What is a can-cutting test?
5. Hamburger used in most fast-food restaurants probably is of what USDA grade?
6. What are two disadvantages in using USDA prime beef?
7. Who should be in charge of food purchasing?
8. How is the food-purchasing system related to the food and beverage cost-control system?

Internet Exercise

1. Go to the Sysco Food Service Web site at www.sysco.com and see what restaurant products are available.

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