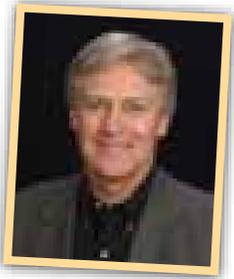


# MAINTAIN YOUR GAIN Follow Up to the Jim Laube "Food Cost Fitness" Workshop

*Like Any Good Fitness Program, Maintenance is Key!*



**IF YOU ATTENDED THE JIM LAUBE SEMINAR AT THE MAINES FOOD SHOW IN MAY**, you gained valuable strategies for controlling food costs at your restaurant. Now that a few months have passed, it may be time for a tune-up to ensure you're maintaining healthy profits and trimming your waste. *Keep this list handy and make sure you're implementing these essential habits:*

## 1 Take Daily Inventory on Key Items.

Identify your top 10-15 products that make up the bulk of your food cost. First thing each day, record the starting quantity (and add any purchases made during the day). At day's end, take inventory of remaining product quantities. Then, subtract that amount to get actual usage. Now, compare that to your POS product usage report. If actual usage is greater than POS, investigate for theft, over-portioning or another food utilization issue.

## 2 Don't Accept Lunchtime Deliveries.

During the lunch rush, your people are swamped and can't accurately check in products.

## 3 Ensure Maximum Usage of Your Products.

Have a plan to utilize usable trim and byproducts somewhere on your menu. Use in soups, garnishes and even sauces!

## 4 Calibrate Dial Scales.

Dial scales are inexpensive and handy portioning tools. But scales can get dropped or knocked around which leads to inaccurate readings. Keep your scales (and portioning) accurate by regularly calibrating them using a separate weight like a roll or two of coins: A roll of dimes weighs 4 ounces and a roll of quarters is 8 ounces.

## 5 Calculate and Analyze Prime Costs Each Week.

It's a fact: what gets measured, gets improved. And your biggest and most volatile costs are food, beverage and labor, otherwise known as "prime costs." Smart restaurants know their prime cost at the end of each week – and so should you. When there is a problem, you can make immediate improvements.

## 6 Establish Daily Prep Level "Par."

Kitchen managers and chefs that shoot from the hip when deciding how much food to prepare often end up shooting you in the foot! Food should be prepared based on anticipated sales for each shift – so set ideal levels in advance.

## 7 Filter Frying Oil Every Shift.

Change Fry Oil Weekly. Keeping oil clean and fresh not only enhances the food's flavor, but also prolongs the useful life and, therefore, helps in controlling costs.

For more tips and tactics just for independent restaurant owners, visit Jim Laube's website:

[www.restaurantowner.com](http://www.restaurantowner.com)



*Turn Over a New Leaf* 🌿  
Incorporate More Produce into Your Menu

# PRODUCE: *The New Center of Plate*

BY LINDSAY OTT



*Gone are the days when a sprig of parsley was the only sign of fresh produce in a restaurant's main dish.*

*Today, the most successful restaurateurs are pushing fruits, vegetables, greens, and fresh herbs to the forefront of every course. Giving produce more prominence on your menu differentiates your restaurant from the competition while boosting profit. At the same time, produce-centric dishes appeal to today's customer who expects value, quality, and a flavor adventure in every bite.*

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The colorful topping will add VISUAL EXCITEMENT and the *unexpected sweet and savory* combination will EXCITE THE CUSTOMER'S PALATE.



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## THE CASE OF RISING COMMODITY PRICES AND SHRINKING PORTIONS

Thanks to inflation, commodity costs are climbing this summer with meat and seafood at record highs. So what's a restaurant operator to do? Raise menu prices, passing the cost increase on to the customer, who's already struggling with a lackluster job market and outrageous fuel prices? Or, worse, keep prices the same but reduce the protein portion and hope the customer doesn't notice? Customers are hyper-sensitive right now to value. If you're going to take something away, you've got to give something in return.

*And that's where produce factors in:*

Instead of simply removing that 10 oz. NY Strip with a side of the old standard of steamed mixed vegetables, **reengineer your menu!**

- > Include a 6 oz. option on a bed of micro greens and pickled onions, topped with an inventive sauce such as a wild mushroom and balsamic reduction.
- > Spice up the steamed side with fresh, aromatic fennel bulbs and a house-made lemon-sage butter.
- > Even with a smaller steak, the plate appears fuller, the customer is treated to multiple, inventive flavors and the value perception is higher.

*And it's all because you challenged your chefs to channel their expertise into produce, not just protein.*

## YES, YOUR CUSTOMERS KNOW ABOUT FENNEL BULBS

Customers are more sophisticated than ever and want to see diverse, exciting flavor profiles on your menu. In fact, Culinary Tides Inc., a trend-forecasting company, notes that an overall trend in 2011 is the shift from comfort towards experimentation. Just look around your local grocery. Today you'll see kumquats and fiddleheads mixed in with basic lettuce heads and beefsteak tomatoes. The more you can integrate "exotic" produce into your main dishes, the higher the value perception of your restaurant.

## REINTERPRET THE CLASSICS

While exotic produce is one way to energize your menu and keep food costs under control, urging your chefs to get creative with "classic" fruits and vegetables is another tactic to try. Ask your Maines Account Manager for the weekly produce report to discover what's in season and at the lowest price. For example, right now zucchini and summer squash are abundant at Northeast Farms – and therefore cost-effective. But don't simply sauté them in butter and call it a side, try panko crusting and then lightly frying them tempura-style. Watermelon is also typically priced lower this time of year, but instead of a simple fruit salad, try topping a fish steak such as halibut or swordfish with a fresh watermelon salsa. The colorful topping will add visual excitement and the unexpected sweet and savory combination will excite the customer's palate.



## THE PYRAMID HAS CRUMBLLED...

Bringing more produce onto your menu doesn't just satisfy customer demands for value and unique flavor experiences. There's also the health factor at work. This June, the USDA brought down the food pyramid launched in 1992, replacing it with a simple plate icon that suggests that half of your meal should contain fruits and vegetables. In the past few years, there's also been a rising focus on the importance of produce thanks to the three O's: Obesity, Obama, and Oliver. Many health experts blame the rise in childhood obesity on the lack of fresh fruits and vegetables in the average American diet. And both Michele Obama, with her White House garden and Let's Move! Initiative, and Jamie Oliver with his primetime Food Revolution TV show, are rallying for more produce in our diets. This heightened awareness of the importance of fruits and vegetables makes it even easier to bring produce to the center stage on your menu.

## MARKETING THE MOVE TO MORE PRODUCE

While customers want to increase their consumption of produce for health reasons, they don't want the health factor shoved in their faces when they're dining out. When reengineering your menu to include more produce, don't section off your new offerings in a "healthy dining" area on the menu. However, it's important to write robust menu descriptions to help market the new additions. Just as adding more produce to an entrée fills out the plate, it should also make for more enticing menu descriptions!



## TASTING NOTES

from *Guy Zehner*

Maines' own Guy Zehner is always on the lookout for the latest trends. Here's what vegetable-focused dishes caught his attention at restaurants across the U.S. on his recent travels.

### MENU ITEM:

A 5 oz. whitefish served on top of microgreens and arugula with baby beets.

### NOTES:

"I wasn't bothered by the smaller portion of whitefish because the spicy greens and tender beets provided plenty of flavor and varying textures."

### MENU ITEM:

1 large diver's scallop on top of fried green tomatoes with a roasted heirloom tomato and porcini mushroom sauce, drizzled with smoke-infused olive oil.

### NOTES:

"I'd take this over five bacon-wrapped scallops any day. The giant scallop was perfectly prepared and the layered flavors added a richness and depth to the dish."

### MENU ITEM:

Three oysters on the half shell, each topped with different ingredients.

### NOTES:

"I know you're wondering...did they forget the other three? But by topping each of the oysters with a different ingredient combination, the dish was equally filling and more satisfying than a half dozen standard oysters. Instead of paying \$18 for six, I was happy to 'shell' out \$9."