

The production and service of meals to older individuals is, in reality, a food service business and must be operated as such. A food service business is a complex organization, and food service operations can be difficult for someone not trained or experienced in food services to understand.

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO KNOW?

Food quality is a critical component of a contemporary senior nutrition programs. As the baby boomers age and become participants in the congregate and home delivered nutrition programs, participant quality standards will evolve. Both quality of the meals offered and the yield from the purchased product to make these meals, need to be considered in order to attract program participants and meet the competition that is entering the market to provide meals for older individuals. Home delivered and congregate nutrition programs for older individuals may be provided by an agency which offers multiple services to older individuals in addition to nutrition. As a result management of the nutrition programs may be just one area of a person's administrative responsibilities, and this person may or may not have a background or experience in food service operations. For program managers and staff without specific food service training, this handout provides a summary of basic aspects of food service management that are critical for all senior nutrition programs.

WHAT IS A FOOD SERVICE SYSTEM?

A food service business is a system comprised of multiple integrated components. For a food service to be successful, attention must be given to the activities incorporated into each of the system components. The following components represent a flow of product from where it is purchased to when it is served to a program participant:

Procurement

Successful product procurement, or purchasing, means having a purchasing process in place that leads to the program having the right quality of the right product being received at the right place at the right time.

Receiving

Product receiving should be done only by a person designated to have that responsibility. This person must know about food/food products and be trained in proper receiving procedures for foods and supplies.

Storage

An adequate amount of dry, refrigerated, and frozen storage is needed to maintain product quality and prevent product loss from spoilage or theft. How each item is dated, placed within the storage area and the temperatures at which it is stored, are important factors in maintaining product quality.

Production

Planning for food product production should be done at least a day prior to the day the food is to be produced in the kitchen. Standardized recipes are needed for all menu items prepared in the production kitchen. Once items are prepared, they must be held at an appropriate temperature until needed for packaging or serving.

Serving

Portion control is a critical factor when serving food or dishing food into meal trays for packaging. Without good portion control, the meals served may or may not meet the nutritional requirements for meals for older individuals. Meal costs are also affected when portion control is not monitored carefully. The kitchen could end up with left-over product for which they have no use. Left-overs frequently become food waste which adds to meal costs without providing any food to anyone.

Transportation

Whether food is to be transported in bulk (e.g., not portioned into individual meals) to congregate sites or as individual meals for home delivered meal clients, the food must be packed into appropriate transport equipment. Food might also be transported in various types of containers that will heat or chill the foods using the transport vehicles electrical system during the transportation time.

The importance of maintaining high standards for food safety and sanitation at each step in the food service system cannot be over-emphasized. Senior nutrition programs are preparing meals that are frequently served to a population that is at high risk for complications from food borne illness. Many older individuals are immune compromised or have an increased risk for illness and do not have the physical reserves to “bounce back” from an incidence of foodborne illness. Programs need to operate their food services in accord with the United States Food Code food safety and sanitation standards or in accord with their state standards when the state standards do not match with the Federal Food Code.

WHY IS ATTENTION TO FOOD SAFETY AND SANITATION CRITICAL TO YOUR PROGRAM'S SUCCESS?

Food service organizations are complex systems comprised of multiple components that must

be well integrated if the food service is to be a success. To be effective, senior nutrition programs must recognize that they are food service businesses to ensure that their programs can be effective, optimize available financial and human resources in order to thrive. Appropriate food handling limits the risk of foodborne illness among program participants and mitigates potential outbreaks that can prove catastrophic for a senior nutrition program in terms of legal liability, and ruin a program's reputation within the community.

Today, for-profit businesses are entering the market of providing meals for older individuals. These entities generally provide only a meal to their “customer” (the program participant) via a delivery service, resulting in their ability to offer competitively priced meals, often lower than that of most programs. It is more important than ever that senior nutrition programs are operated as an efficient, cost-effective food service business that will be competitive in the marketplace. Managers and staff with management responsibilities relative to the programs' food service operations should take advantage of every opportunity to learn about the food service industry and the operation of a food service business.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Foodservice Director. CSP Business Media, L.L.C. 1 Tower Lane, Suite 2000, Oakbrook Terrace, IL 60181. Phone: 630-574-5075. <http://www.foodservicedirector.com>.

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Written by: Audrey C. McCool, EdD, RD, FADA. Commissioned by the NRCNA.