



# Providing healthier and sustainable meals for canteen settings: a practical guide for selecting your catering provider

The Workforce Nutrition Alliance developed this practical checklist to help companies make an informed decision when selecting the best nutrition and sustainability-conscious catering provider for their organisation. This comprehensive checklist is divided into four key sections: **'Menu options,' 'Nudging,' 'Portion control,'** and **'Food safety'**, with the aim to simplify the selection process by highlighting the key areas of compliance to consider. By using this checklist as guiding framework, companies can easily evaluate potential caterers committed to nutrition, sustainability and food safety.

To ensure the optimal utilization of this tool, we have outlined three steps that enable companies to assess effectively the caterer's offerings, align them with the organisation's needs and goals, and ultimately select a catering provider that best suits their requirements. By following these steps, you can navigate the selection process with confidence and make a well-informed decision.

## Step 1: Research of catering providers

- Compile a list of potential catering providers that match with the organisation needs and goals.
- Perform a preliminary evaluation of their menus, sustainability initiatives, certifications, and service practices.

## Step 2: Assessment of the food offering and practices

- For every catering provider, review individually their approach by examining their practices compliance with the requirements listed in each of the four sections of this document.

## Step 3: Making an informed decision

- Analyse and compare the information gathered per catering provider.
- Select the caterer that meet all or most of the requirements presented in each of the four areas of criteria.

# Menu Options

By serving healthy food in the canteens, employers can directly impact the health of their workforce helping to reduce the risk of noncommunicable diseases (e.g., heart disease, obesity, diabetes) and other lifestyle related health problems. Additionally, promoting healthier food choices often aligns with sustainable eating practices. The steps taken to enhance sustainability are crucial for the environment and can also lead to significant cost savings in catering. Listed below are some criteria that caterers should follow to ensure their menu's food options meet nutrition and sustainability standards.

## How healthy are the meals offered?

- Every meal should follow the principle of a healthy diet, including whole grains, fresh fruits and vegetables, lean proteins, and plant-based options.
- Vegetables and fruits available in all food outlets.
- Limit (ultra-)processed food offered (e.g., 1 time every 2 weeks).
- Offer clean water and sugar-free beverages as default options and limit sugary and soft drinks.
- Ensure >70% of food and drink items provided fall in the GREEN category and 0% fall in the RED category.  
*(see Guidebook on [Healthy Food at Work](#))*
- Ensure variety by daily alternating the protein source (e.g., plant-based or animal products).
- Include fortified products as ingredients (e.g. grains, oil, salt).
- Limit the salt added to seasoning by using herbs and spices instead.

## How sustainable are the meals offered?

- Offer at least one plant-based option daily.
- Tweak familiar dishes in the menu to make them more nutrient-dense plant-based and meat-free.
- If possible, utilize sustainable blue foods (e.g., aquatic bivalves, small pelagic fish, plants and algae) as an alternative to red meat and processed dishes.
- Reduce food waste by using the edible parts of foods in the meal (mostly from fruit and vegetables).
- Reuse leftover ingredients for the next day's meal or snack.
- Use local and seasonal ingredients.
- Donate surplus food to organisations, charities, schools, etc.
- Use certified sustainable suppliers that ensure ethical sourcing.

## Menu Options

### How healthy are the meals offered?

- Default to healthier cooking methods (bake, grill, steam) rather than frying foods.
- Use unsaturated oils (e.g., olive, peanut, sunflower) or fortified oils for cooking instead of saturated fats (e.g., butter, palm, vegetable oil).

### How sustainable are the meals offered?

- Use sustainable, reusable and/or compostable packaging and limit the use of plastic and single use package.
- Use a climate calculation tool to calculate the impact of the dishes.

## Nudging

The food service industry has a significant impact on health, environment, and society. Customer 'nudging' is an effective strategy to encourage consumer behaviour change towards healthier and more sustainable menu options. To ensure your workforce is making health-conscious food choices at work, your caterer plays a crucial role in your food programme strategy. Below is a list of actions caterers should take to steer people in the right direction.

- Use product placement to draw direct attention to the healthier and more sustainable options (eg. in consumers direct line of vision).
- Avoid placing foods and drinks high in fat, sugar or salt by the payment point or in other easy to grab areas.
- Ensure healthy options are enjoyable and attractive, presenting them as the standard option (e.g. offering fruit at the checkout, accessible prices).
- Use natural light and greenery/plants to create a pleasant canteen atmosphere.
- Ensure the display areas of healthier and sustainable options have sufficient and bright lighting.
- Make nutritional information transparent and easily accessible to the consumer in visible locations, (e.g., on or above the counter, menus, menu boards, and product packaging).
- Use clear labelling in compliance with legal and national requirements (e.g., eco-labels, calorie label, traffic light system, 'Nutri-Score', stickers as 'nutritionist's choice', warning signs for unhealthy options).

## Portion Control

Portion control system is probably the most vital aspect of cost management in a food service venues. The weight and volume of a portion of food served is an excellent guide in offering nutritional quality. Controlling portions sizes brings the following benefits: control of food costs, reduction of food waste, and a consistent and standardized service. Below is a list of actions that caterers can implement to guarantee proper control of portions served.

- Use at least one portion from each of the following food groups: Protein foods, vegetables, starchy staples, and fats.  
*(see Guidebook on [Healthy Food at Work](#))*
- Provide portions of food servings that, on average, meet the nutritional requirements of employees.
- Offer standard pre-portioned meals and individually portioned food items.
- Ensure that the food handlers use smaller serving utensils (e.g., spoons and ladles), tableware and containers.
- Reduce the serving portions size of tray dishes (and plates/bowls in the self-service settings).
- Provide visual aids (e.g., portion size diagrams or sample plates) to show the appropriate portion sizes (specially in self-service settings).

## Food Safety

The caterer has the responsibility to ensure that the food presented is safe to eat, hygienic and will not cause any foodborne illness. To ensure compliance with the national and international food safety requirements, the caterer should respect the following criteria.

- Have a Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) hygiene code certificate.
- Compliance with all food safety and hygiene rules in the preparation, storage and transport of food items according to the national legislation.
- Compliance with a risk prevention plan.
- Compliance with the individual hygiene rules of the personnel assigned to the service during all operations.
- Ensure the personnel is correctly uniformed, in accordance with the requirements provided in the applicable legislation.
- Guarantee and enforce a quality monitoring and evaluation of processes and methods (e.g., food quality, service quality, reception, information, etc.).
- Ensure control of the food supply, in particular traceability and identification of the origin of food products.

## Food Safety

- Ensure foods that require special storage conditions are always kept in climate-controlled equipment.
- Maintain accurate temperature records of the food served, from preparation to serving, and establish written procedures for proper food storage.
- Ensure daily collection of sample meals to test for possible foodborne illness. All samples must be collected in compliance-adherent bag, labelled (which includes the date) and stored in refrigerated equipment for 72 hours.
- Clearly and accessibly label information about food allergens in accordance with national labelling requirements.
- Follow guidelines and best practices for handling allergens and preventing cross-contamination.
- Have product specifications sheets with technical and nutritional information per dish - specify the amount of each raw ingredient used, the caloric value and nutrient content and description of the cooking methods used.

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## References

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