

COVID-19 SPECIAL EDITION

FOOD FANATICS®

**OUR INDUSTRY
IN TRANSITION**





FOOD FANATICS

COVID-19 SPECIAL ISSUE 2020

Sharing the Love of Food—Inspiring Business Success

ON THE COVER

A view from Pastis in New York's City's meatpacking district. The restaurant decided to close during the pandemic, not offering takeout or delivery. See considerations for operating or temporarily closing operations on page 28.

02 /

ONE MEAL FITS ALL

8 Ways takeout family-style options can cushion the blow of dine-in shutdowns

By Jackie Raposo

► Family-style meals

may not jump off the Richter scale of innovation, but they can be the difference between perishing or persisting when governments shut down restaurants, caterers and other foodservice operations over public health concerns.

A variety of restaurants across the country chose this practice or included an option for takeout when efforts to flatten the curve of the novel coronavirus ended on-site dining.

This move allowed restaurateurs to keep some workers, pay operational costs, reduce inventory and provide free meals to communities in need. In some cases, they outsold individual options, which happened at Chicago restaurants Maple & Ash and Etta, according to chef Danny Grant.

To determine whether family-style offerings are a viable choice after stay-at-home orders are lifted or social gathering bans are removed, gain insights from those who leaned on family meals when the country faced the most crushing human and economic blow in modern history.



1

STREAMLINE

Ensuring ease and simplicity is crucial, operators say. At Alon Shaya's Safta in Denver, six cooks—a reduction from 32—handle three family meals to provide variety, but they remain consistent day-to-day. The Meatball Shop in New York added a family-style meal option to its robust delivery and pickup menu, but the service needed only four staff members to execute.

To accommodate staff cuts and balance labor costs, high-labor items can't be a part of the mix. And ingredients cannot be hard to source. "We want to make sure we have a core menu of things that we can get readily, that won't spoil, and that are used based on our current pars," says Adam Rosenbaum, The Meatball Shop CEO.

2

PRIORITIZE SEASONALITY

The flexibility of a changing family meal menu helps minimize food waste. At Ralph's on the Park in New Orleans, Chip Flanagan and other chefs first put out dishes that used perishable inventory. Then, they looked to their local purveyors.

Because business losses—85% for Shaya—extend to purveyors, seasonality becomes even more important. "The person growing radishes for the restaurant is just as affected by this," Shaya says. "If we can put them on a dish, then we're helping everybody." Flanagan's prioritized collard greens and beef reserved for him. "We're trying to keep locals going, even though we're cooking less variety," he says.

3

BE TRANSPARENT WITH COSTS

A family meal for two can be subjective, which is why it's wise to add qualifiers and advice, such as, "For larger appetites, consider sizing up." Diners won't balk at costs if the prices are in line with the restaurant's regular price points. Until shortages of premium products arise, menu costs shouldn't increase.

"Right now, we haven't had to make that sacrifice," notes executive chef Harley Peet of Bluepoint Hospitality Group in Easton, Maryland. "If that changes, we absolutely will reflect the price directly to the customer."

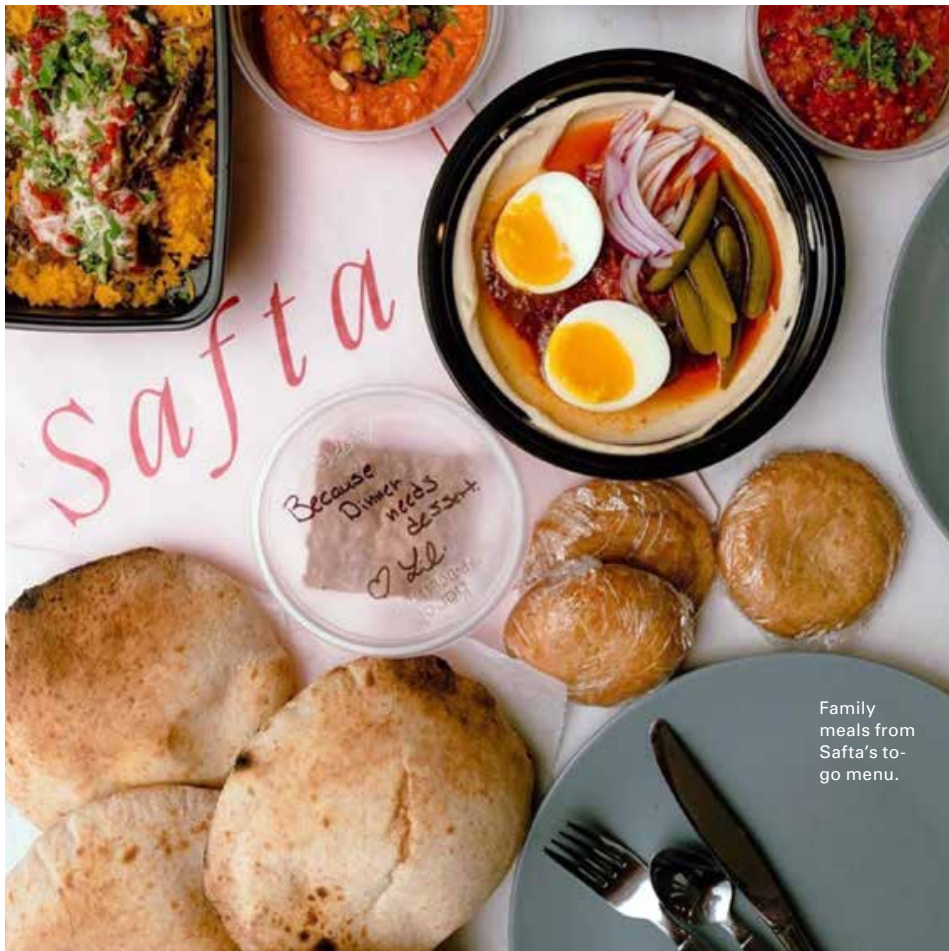
4

LOVE REGULARS HARDER

Social media and emails to established customers have greatly helped word get around, chefs say. "I'm not discounting community," says Danny Lledo of Xiquet and Slate Wine Bar in Washington, D.C. "But from what we see of people actually buying, 80% are people that have been here before." Third-party delivery aggregators can help if they reduce or eliminate fees, but Rosenbaum notes that The Meatball Shop's new family meal orders largely come from its current customer base.



"Food is a big part of healing," says Alon Shaya, who comforted New Orleanians after Hurricane Katrina and now guides his community at Safta in Denver. On top of a la carte items, he's added family meals to his to-go menu. "Families can use them as a starting point to discuss what's happening. Is the hummus making you feel better? Is the hot broth helping your sore throat?" he says. "We can still provide some sense of normalcy through all this."





A fish fry with coleslaw and hush puppies from Ralph's on the Park, top, leg of lamb with spring vegetables from Xiquet and lasagna from Sunflowers and Greens.



CHEF: CHIP FLANAGAN

Restaurant: Ralph's on the Park, New Orleans

Menu: Publishes a new menu weekly, offering dishes like grilled steak frites with steamed asparagus bearnaise and cheddar-garlic rolls or a fish fry with coleslaw and hush puppies.

Cost: Two for \$25, four for \$50, with a la carte add-ons, like turtle soup and dessert.

"We were thinking comfort food, family-style," Flanagan says. "Customers didn't want our \$28 redfish dish—they wanted something more accessible. Family-style keeps costs low and gets the food sold."



CHEF: DANNY LLEDO

Restaurant: Xiquet and Slate Wine Bar, Washington, D.C.

Menu: Large-scale roasted dinners with varying levels of charcuterie, salads, side dishes and dessert.

Cost: Various, averaging \$25 to \$60 per person.

"We worked backwards: What can we do that's different? We're spending so much time with our families at home. It's an important time to relish," Lledo says. "Having something special and unique makes sense."



CHEF: HARLEY PEET

Restaurant: Bluepoint Hospitality Group, Easton, Maryland

Menu: One family meal changes every Friday, such as lasagna with housemade pasta, garlic bread and housemade ice cream.

Cost: Four people, \$85.

"To keep all the people putting in hours, down to the bakery doing viennoiserie and laminating and breads every day, we've decided to offer a little bit of each venue out of Sunflowers and Greens. It's very fresh. It's very alive. It changes all the time."