

Commonly asked Q&As for pubs introducing hot food menus

Responses by Joshua Bruce, Welbilt's key account manager for pubs, who rose through the ranks from pot washer to head chef, before turning his hand to kitchen equipment

Q: What are the main challenges facing wet-led pubs when it comes to introducing food?

Wet-led pubs really face two big challenges. The first is staffing costs. It's expensive to recruit, retain and train staff, especially people who are skilled in both pub management and food operations. Those are usually two very separate disciplines, and it's rare to find people who can confidently do both.

Second, many wet-led pubs don't have kitchens, so you're asking staff whose primary role is pulling pints to also upsell food, follow food safety processes, manage space awareness and operate equipment. That's difficult. But having even a small food offering keeps customers in the pub for longer. Without it, people get peckish, leave to eat elsewhere, and often don't come back. That's lost revenue.

If pubs can offer even simple food, they capture those customers and increase dwell time and spend. The challenge has always been staffing, and that's where Merrychef really comes into its own. It's easy to use, simple to operate and has a minimal footprint, which makes it manageable for pub staff.

Q: What do operators need to think about before serving food?

It's about space and compliance. Do they have room and need for fridges or freezers? Handwash facilities? What are the legal requirements to serve food? It's only slightly different from serving drinks – but it is different and those differences matter.

Merrychef can help guide operators through what's required and point them towards the right people and authorities. Ultimately, it's their responsibility, but we do have the experience to support them through that process.

Q: Can you support operators beyond just supplying equipment?

Yes. We also offer Welbilt TotalCare support packages. A lot of wet-led operators are nervous about adding food because they see it as added complexity – especially concerns around breakdowns and repair costs. TotalCare removes that stress entirely. And you get standard warranty for 2 years with Merrychef connex® ovens.

Also, leasing is a big one at the moment. Many operators want to reduce CAPEX and move to an OPEX model. In pubs, cash is often tight. Leasing makes it much easier to manage financially. We can offer a range of lease terms on Merrychef equipment, to ensure operators can access market leading kit while preserving cashflow, including headache free, fully inclusive service and maintenance packages.

On the culinary side, we have dedicated pub-sector expertise. I've worked in the pub sector for over 20 years – from pot washer to head chef. Our culinary team understands the business. We design, programme and support menus for Merrychef systems so they're easy for staff to operate.



Q: Why is Merrychef such a good fit for wet-led pubs?

Space is the biggest win. In wet-led pubs, back-bar or wash-up space is premium. Merrychef delivers maximum output from the smallest possible footprint. In some cases, we've replaced coffee machines with Merrychef units and achieved a higher return through food, without adding staff. The kit also works off a 13-amp plug, which is important to know.

Ease of use is critical. Anyone who can follow simple instructions can operate a Merrychef. It can be as simple as open the packet, place the product on the tray, press the programme and within two minutes, food is ready. That simplicity is what makes it viable for wet-led pubs.

Q: What kind of food can operators realistically offer?

In a wet-led pub environment, it's about social, casual food. Sharing plates are a huge trend: nachos, loaded snacks, small plates that people can pick at while drinking and socialising.

Nachos are a great example. Customers see one bowl go out and this turns into six or seven across the pub, which keeps people engaged, increases spend and delivers strong margins. Operators can also offer more traditional pub food such as pies if they choose. It's about capturing that social dining moment rather than becoming a full food pub.

Q: How easy is Merrychef to use day to day?

I always say: if you can use a mobile phone, you can use a Merrychef. We can programme step-by-step instructions directly onto the screen. For example, remove packaging, place product on a coloured liner, press start. It's visual, intuitive and removes guesswork.

Every Merrychef installation includes free on-site training. And if operators want a refresher later, they can access resources online at no cost or attend a masterclass.

Q: What support is available around menus and recipes?

Our Ready Recipes platform is free and available on our website, to provide inspiration and ease of use for operators. Operators can access settings to over 300 recipes, knowing they'll get consistent results. We want to remove as many hurdles as possible and make food adoption straightforward.

Q: What can visitors expect to see at HRC?

They'll meet the pub experts including myself, our culinary chefs and senior leadership, all people who understand this sector. We'll have live cooking on the stand with pub-focused, on-trend food, including sharing boards and modern takes on traditional pub dishes.

Visitors can see the equipment in action, try the food, and have real conversations about their business challenges. We're not just presenting equipment, we're presenting solutions tailored specifically to the pub sector.



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