

COMPASS GROUP HEEDS THE CALL ... AND THEN SOME

Compass Group USA, the leading foodservice management and support services company, announced in February that it has adopted four new initiatives based on the Menus of Change Principles of Healthy, Sustainable Menus. While Compass Group, which posted \$13.6 billion in revenues in 2014, has made commitments towards health and environmental imperatives over the years, it considers these four new initiatives as the necessary next steps to help make the foodservice industry sustainable in the future.

Metrics are at the core of its new program. Compass Group developed a Menus of Change scorecard in conjunction with its global purchasing arm, Foodbuy, to benchmark and measure its progress. All four commitments will be measured over the next three years, starting January 1, 2015, and will compare baseline amounts from each quarter every year, year over year. The amounts will be measured in total purchasing volume of produce and red meat, and total spend on whole grains. The four commitments are:

Commitment 1: “Increasing customers’ access to vegetables and fruits by focusing on globally inspired, largely plant-based cooking.”

- Goal and measurement: Increase pounds of produce by five percent each year.
- Menu engineering: While fresh produce is considered optimal, frozen vegetables will be included, as will efforts such as: offering the option of two vegetable sides for certain meal combinations, aiming to fill half the plate with fruits and vegetables, and stealth nutrition like adding more vegetables to chili.

Commitment 2: “Including recipes and concepts where meat plays more of a supporting role, reducing red meat portion sizes and offerings, and leveraging strategies from seasonal and local flavors, vegetable proteins, and global cuisines.”

- Goal and measurement: Reduce beef purchases by 10 percent each year, and address other red meat (pork and lamb) in years two and three.
- Menu engineering in the first year: The goal will be to increase options for existing promotions such as “flexitarian” and “mushroom blended favorites,” which are hamburgers made of fresh mushrooms combined with ground beef. Other efforts will include focusing on non-beef seasonal specialty sandwiches for catering and grab-and-go menu items, and taking inspiration from Mediterranean and Asian preparations where meat is served in combination with vegetables and grains rather than as the star at the center of the plate.

Commitment 3: “Increasing our offerings of grain options that are at least more than 50 percent whole grain.”

- Goal and measurement: Increase purchases of whole grains by five percent each year, and always offer a 50 to 100 percent whole-grain option for rice, pasta, potato, and bread choices.
- Menu engineering: The efforts to reach this goal include: offering special sandwiches on whole-grain bread, highlighting at least one whole grain in daily specials, making brown rice available, featuring whole grains in select exhibition-style bowls, and offering more whole-grain options for breakfast.

Commitment 4: “Conscious Menuing and Messaging. Promote health and sustainability through inspiring menus, customer interaction at the chef’s table, and telling the story about great food.”

- Goal and measurement: By leading through flavor first, elevate the role of the chef as the bridge to making healthy choices. Aim for positive feedback from annual client satisfaction surveys and quarterly business reviews.
- Menu engineering: The main approaches for the fourth commitment are around messaging, telling stories about specific farms and growing practices behind ingredients, using social media to highlight relevant menu items, and encouraging guests to try something new through sampling.



As part of its emphasis on leading with flavor, Compass won't be heavily promoting the changes at the unit level. Instead, Christine Seitz, vice president of culinary for Compass Group USA Business Excellence, says, “Our voice to our consumer and client is through our menu engineering.” For instance, in a corporate cafeteria, a tablespoon of farro might be tossed into a salad as a garnish or blended into a meatloaf instead of the traditional bread, adding texture and a nutty flavor, with as only discernable effects the dish’s appealing appearance and taste, and an enticing menu heading that creates interest in the dish for its story, not for its nutrients. The light-bulb moment for Seitz was a realization she had during the 2014 Menus of Change conference, which she attended with several of her colleagues: “I loved the point about seatbelts and smoking, and how long it takes to create change,” she says. “I was part of the ‘Super Size Me’ era in the ‘80s, the movement to increase portion and plate sizes to show value. We serve over seven million meals a day, and our culinary teams can effect change with sustainable portion sizes.” A few weeks later, in July, Compass pledged to strive toward these goals starting January 1, 2015.

She had to convince the senior leadership to commit, so she developed a task force of over 80 chefs, dietitians, and marketing and communication leads—including Deanne Brandstetter, vice president of nutrition and wellness at Compass Group, the Americas and former co-chair of the CIA’s Healthy Menus R&D Collaborative—to determine how the commitments would be applied to all the different levels of business, from K-12 and business and industry (B&I) to hospitals and senior living. Their culinary leaders and this task force are implementing the changes at the unit level.

Marc Zammit, former vice president of corporate sustainability for Compass and a founding member of the Menus of Change Sustainable Business Leadership Council, led many of the strides Compass made in food purchasing and product development, for example, around antibiotics and seafood. He says it was clear to the Compass leadership that now is the time for a shift of this magnitude: “It was the perfect storm between the initiative’s message and what customers wanted.”