



Cycle Menus



The Benefits of Set Menu Rotations

Child Nutrition, Maine Department of Education

1 What is a Cycle Menu?

A series of menus that are repeated over a specified period of time.

Most menu cycles are planned in 3-, 4-, or 5-week periods.

Each day within the cycle is different, but the same cycle can be repeated many times.



2 Saves Time

With cycle menus, less time is spent on planning meals and organizing records.

Production records can be pre-filled out, and directly inputted into spreadsheets to minimize paperwork.



3 Increases Efficiency

Since menus are repeated, staff become familiar with recipes and how long each item takes to prepare.

The repetition of meals increases proficiency, leading to ease of operation.

4 Streamlines Ordering

When menus are planned in advance, it creates a standard list of items to shop for.

Less time is spent gathering information, and it becomes easier to project what needs to be ordered.

5 Prepares for Emergencies

What happens when someone is out sick or injured, and they're the only ones who know what's happening with the meals?

Cycle menus always keep you in the know about what, not just the week, but the month looks like. There are no surprises, and it helps you plan for when true surprises pop up.



6 Reduces Food Costs

By planning in a sequence, tracking student selection becomes easier and makes forecasting future needs more straightforward.

This ultimately reduces over-ordering and food waste.

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1. Maine Department of Education Child Nutrition Programs. Cycle Menus and Production Records. 2025.
2. Menu Planning for Child Nutrition Programs--Cycle Menus. 2016. Accessed August 4, 2026. <https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/menu-planning/cycle-menus>