

The ACA Corner: August insights from Manna from Heaven



The ACA Corner presented in partnership with Official Media Partner PAX International is a column dedicated to voicing expertise directly from ACA members. ACA represents more than 65 percent of the worldwide airline catering market. ACA invites all members to share their views in future editions of the ACA Corner by contacting Mercedes Dieguez.

Supplier's perspective: Ashley Meddings, Managing Director, Manna From Heaven

Understanding ingredient complexity in inflight catering

Whilst there have been great advancements in food technology over the decades which have helped improve food availability, convenience and safety, developments in food processing have changed the nature of many foods we eat. In essence, some ingredients now have “ingredient lists” of their own.

One useful example is the different ways in which “chicken” can be formulated depending on the product and its intended use.

A prepackaged sandwich or a salad with chicken does not mean the chicken is necessarily the same ingredient across all products, as different chicken products may be designed to meet different nutritional, technical or operational requirements.

Ingredients like chicken can now sit along a spectrum ranging from 100 percent chicken breast to “chicken breast” that is made with chicken and includes other ingredients. For example, some prepackaged chicken breast can have more than 10 ingredients, including things like starches, sugars, soy protein, thickeners, etc. These additional ingredients can serve specific technical purposes — for example, helping to maintain texture, consistency, food safety and quality throughout preparation, chilling, storage and reheating.

When products are made “from scratch,” this should mean that the raw material used is as close as possible to its natural form, but in today’s evolving and innovative supply chain, diligence is increasingly required across the industry, with the conversation also evolving.

Product selection in inflight catering is also a collaborative process. In some cases, products may be nominated or specified by an airline and subsequently sourced and handled by the caterer. This makes it important for airline culinary and procurement teams, caterers and suppliers to share their respective expertise early in the selection process.

Caterers can bring valuable operational, food safety and manufacturing insight to these discussions, helping to ensure that products are not only suitable from a commercial and culinary perspective, but also meet the practical, nutritional and quality expectations associated with inflight service.

Across the inflight catering supply chain, understanding ingredient specifications and the purpose of different components is therefore increasingly important. Caterers operate to strict food safety,

quality and procurement standards and are attentive to the composition of the products entering their supply chains. Working with independent nutrition experts — as we do with Dr. Melissa Adamski — can provide an additional level of expertise when reviewing and interpreting ingredient lists, assessing product specifications and ensuring suppliers meet consistent standards.

Ultimately, the objective is not simply to reduce the number of ingredients, but to understand why they are present and to make informed choices that balance nutrition, quality, food safety and operational performance. This level of diligence, combined with strong collaboration between airlines, caterers and suppliers, is an important part of responsible product development, supplier management and the high standards expected within inflight catering.

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