

Army Campus Dining?

Army Center of Excellence Subsistence, Operations Directorate, is researching a campus-style strategy to improve the Army food program and boost utilization. (PHOTO COURTESY: WALLACE MCBRIDE, FORT JACKSON LEADER)

ACES Plan Anticipates Higher Utilization, Lower Overhead

A plan to improve the Army food program envisions a campus-style format that introduces alternatives to standard dining facilities and anticipates stronger utilization.

Army Center of Excellence Subsistence, Operations Directorate (ACES OD) is researching a campus-style strategy that would achieve lower overhead, such as labor, utilities and other expenses, by reducing the number of active dining facilities needed per installation.

ACES OD is considering a provisions-on-demand strategy using kiosks and retail stores, or “G-stores,” until a permanent name is chosen, to supplement remaining standard, traditional Army dining facilities.

“We’re looking at small kiosks with simple menus as an alternative for the Subsistence in Kind (SIK) soldier,” said Stephen Primeau, foodservice system analyst, ACES. “We’re talking about setting that up in locations where we’ve had to draw back a full-size dining facility just because of the extreme cost of running one in these outside locations.”

ACES OD plans to locate the kiosks and retail stores closest to dense population areas on each installation and operate them outside regular dining facility hours, creating more convenient access.

“A typical dining facility closes at 6 o’clock at night, half these people don’t want to eat until seven or eight, so by then they’re forced to go somewhere else,” Primeau said. “We’re going to have something open where they can go eat; that’s what our intent is.”

Soldiers holding meal cards are expected to benefit from more flexibility to get what they want to eat, while continuing to support the Army foodservice program.

SIK soldiers get free meals at dining facilities that are paid for by the Army, but choose to spend their own money and go elsewhere to get what they want. “He can get a meal that the Army is supposed to provide to them without having to race a couple of miles to get to a facility,” he said. “We don’t want them spending money out of their own pocket.”

Initially, the ACES OD plan introduces campus-style provisions-on-demand dining only at U.S. Army

bases in the continental United States (CONUS). Training installations also are not included, as they follow the Initial Military Training (IMT) menu, which is stricter than what is used for active duty.

“We’re trying to improve the foodservice quality to support the mission commander goals,” he said. “We’re also trying to provide a quality dining experience within the way the Army operates and within our budgeting resources.”

INDUSTRY PARTNERS

A key to ACES OD’s research into introducing campus-style dining to the Army food program is to ask civilian industry for ideas, expertise, concepts, equipment resources, trends and operational standards that might be successful on military installations.

An early step to discuss ideas with industry partners begins with a briefing by ACES OD at the upcoming Research and Development Associates for Military Food and Packaging (R&DA) fall meeting, October 22 – 23, 2013, at Caesars Atlantic City.

Additionally, ACES OD is receptive to having interested organizations provide a disk with concepts to review operations and design. “If members of industry appear to have concepts that may meet our intent, we would host an industry market research individual forum at our headquarters to gain more insight from our interested industry partners; date and time to be determined,” Primeau said.

Among the organizations ACES OD anticipates working with are food management companies with branded operations that can be added as a new feature of food service on an installation.

“We would really like to do an Army branding,” Primeau said.

SIMILAR EXAMPLES

ACES OD plans for the Army food program are similar to updates made recently by the Air Force, under the Food Transformation Initiative (FTI), and the Marine Corps’ Regional Garrison Food Service Contract II (RGFSC II).

“In a way, we’re taking a little information from what the Marines and the Air Force did,” Primeau said. “We observed how some of our sister services have worked with civilian organizations, and would like to research how doing business with our civilian counterparts could improve or enhance our Army operations.”

FTI is the Air Force’s strategy to improve airmen’s quality of life and reverse a cycle in which airmen



Under the campus dining plan, kiosks and retail stores would result in more locations for soldiers to get meals, while reducing the number of traditional dining facilities needed.

(PHOTO COURTESY: WALLACE MCBRIDE, FORT JACKSON LEADER)

were using the dining facilities less and eating fewer meals there. FTI began in late 2012 at six pilot locations that operate under a contract with Aramark. A second phase began Oct 1, 2012, under a contract with Sodexo involving five additional locations.

Original plans were to do FTI at 13 locations; any plans for the last two sites have not been determined yet.

Under FTI, changes made to traditional DFACS include adding a degree of name recognition, such as “Cooking Light” with Aramark in the first phase and “Global Station,” “Mongolian Wok” and “UFood Grill” with Sodexo in the second round.

The Marine Corps also set the goal of enhancing mess hall utilization rates for Marines and sailors when it awarded two RGFSC II contracts in February and August 2011 to Sodexo for its 31 East and West Coast garrison facilities.

Under RGFSC II, Mess halls will support Sodexo’s Refresh menus, pizzas, pasta, salads, Panini’s, Mon-

golian and buffet-style dining, SubMarine sandwiches, chef action station, deli and salad bars, burrito program, upgraded fast-food menus and assorted beverages and dessert stations.

Also, selected new facilities opening on the East and West Coast get “to-go” style walk-up and drive-up/drive-thru windows.

AWAITING APPROVAL

Still in the proposal stage, ACES OD is working toward a test in fiscal 2015 of its campus-style dining plan. It might start at one or two installations before expanding rapidly, if approval is received and sufficient resources are available.

Dining facilities retired under the plan could be renovated and converted into a G-store if the location results in better, more convenient access for soldiers on base. “We’re going to pick one that suits the needs of the installation personnel,” Primeau said. “We’re looking to do at least one on every installation, maybe on a bigger installation we’ll end up doing two, but this is going to be totally outside where a kiosk is, our intent is to spread out to meet the needs of high-density population areas.”

Dining facilities remaining in use would be used to prepare carryout meals in the kitchens.

“Our intent of what we’re looking to do is, we’re still going to have our standard Army dining facilities on the installation,” he said. “However, what we want to do to improve utilization is to be able to offer alternative locations for diners to go to get what they want to eat that still supports our program.”

The goal concerning kiosk operations is to learn about branding, equipment, supplies and marketing

available to support success and ensure cost-efficient operations.

Kiosks could be a separate, freestanding structure, including a meal truck or a trailer. “We’re still in the development phase of how we want to do it,” he said. “We’re going to get feedback from all our installations about what they’d like to see.”

For the retail, or G-store, operation, ACES wants to learn from industry partners about how to best market a retail space, create branding, understand equipment and select the best menu item availability to meet diner and fiscal realities.

“We called them G-store until we come up with a real name,” he said.

Army foodservice staff would be trained to work in either location to achieve consistent standards. Training begins with the companies selected to participate; once the Army has expertise, it can accomplish subsequent instruction and maintain consistency.

The Army follows a unit-centric model. In food service, cooks are assigned to a unit and work in a dining facility. Under the plan ACES OD is considering, senior military managers work with senior installation management to allocate personnel, determining the number of hours worked and where.

“There’s going to be teamwork between the installation and the tactical side of the house,” he said. “The cooks will always belong to the unit, and the unit commander will be responsible for his folks, but because we’re going to be spreading out where the DFACS are, they might not be just right there in that one area for that one unit to man.”

—GFS