

New seasonal menus offer better quality, similar cost

An airline first—cohesive, themed seasonal menus with weekly rotations—made its debut July 8 with Delta's domestic first class afternoon snacks. Similar changes will extend to coach food service sometime during 1996.

The new food items promise higher quality, more variety, and similar or lower costs. Delta introduced four afternoon snacks for the spring/summer season, including Blue Ridge Chicken Sandwich, San Francisco Teriyaki Chicken and Vegetables, Florida Turkey Sandwich and Chicago Style Chicken Pizza. The new items and frequent rotations counter the most common food service complaint from first class travelers: menu fatigue.

The fall/winter menu will run October through April, featuring heartier items such as New England Chicken Sandwich, Rocky Mountain Turkey Chili, Rio Grande Turkey

Sandwich on a Tomato Roll and Texas Fajita Salad.

"When we tightened meal window parameters last December, much of our first class food service — 72 percent — was classified as 'snacks,' said Michael Sullivan, coordinator—menu development. "The two sandwiches and two salads on our snack menus quickly lost appeal for the frequent travelers who form the bulk of first class passengers."

Emphasis on regional fare

Delta's in-flight customer services department seized the opportunity to create a totally new menu concept — American cuisine, emphasizing familiar regional fare utilizing high quality, seasonally available components.

A team of chefs from Delta's three largest caterers — Dobbs, Caterair and LSG/Sky Chefs — created more than 100 sample snack menus. A facilitated focus group of more than 30 representatives from various Delta



Delta's new American cuisine menu concept includes four afternoon snacks that rotate weekly to meet customer demands for variety. Selections change seasonally; spring/summer selections are shown above.

departments and outside the company reviewed the menus. Anonymous samplings determined 15 top choices based on appeal. The chefs returned to their test kitchens to explore presentation methods and prices that would fit Delta's short serving times and strict cost parameters.

Delivery and cost critical elements

"We worked closely with our executive chef and caterers, negotiating every element," said Sullivan. "Just as critical was the delivery component.

A team of Delta flight attendants helped us figure out how to serve hot items on the shorter flights."

An example: Flight attendants suggested a change in packaging on some items to one easy-to-remove layer of aluminum foil, saving critical seconds per serving.

The new first class lunch and dinner menus will include a prestigious addition — eight award-winning entree and dessert recipes from the Culinary Team USA, a team of the finest U.S. chefs.