

Traditional and healthier varieties of pizza on the Marine Corps menu include whole-wheat crust, vegetable and leaner-meat toppings. (PHOTO COURTESY: MCB CAMP PENDLETON, CALIF.)

## Balancing Flavor and Calories

### Frequency of Consumption Equalizes the Marine Corps' Scales

**W**hen service members follow the Go for Green traffic light color labels toward lean, nutrient-rich performance food options, are they sacrificing flavor for the benefit of fewer calories and lower fat?

All foods can comply with military nutritional guidelines, but the key to success lies in achieving a diet that balances making the right food options with frequency of consumption.

"All foods can fit," said Lt. Col. Sharlene Holladay, Headquarters Marine Corps Warfighter and Performance dietitian and a registered dietitian in the Army Reserve. Marines can even enjoy pizza when it is aligned with the March 2015 National Nutrition Month "Bite into a Healthy Lifestyle," Holladay said.

Salsas, hot sauces and other condiments are available to Marines in mess hall dining rooms to flavor a dish to taste, and are included as ingredients on recipe cards used in kitchens to prepare meals.

"This allows for a variety of options for more elaborate cuisine offerings without unnecessarily increasing the caloric value," Holladay said.

Holladay defines condiments as edible elements that are added to some foods to impart a particular flavor, enhance their flavor or, in some cultures, to complement the dish.

"In American cuisine, the more common items are spice packets and seasoning blends, hot sauces, barbecue/chili sauce, fruit preserves, horseradish, relish and salad dressings," she said. "And, yes, even salt and pepper are considered condiments."

Patrons can also experience alternative meal preparations contained in the Armed Forces Recipe Service and local recipes used by the Marine Corps. These include sauces and food enhancements as part of the preparation directions to ensure consistency across the garrison mess halls.

Adding even more menu diversity, condiments add regional flavors that can be used to personalize a dish without adding undesired calories or fat.

Marine Corps food service encourages Marines to customize the flavor of foods in mess halls with condiments by offering themed meals and featuring the flavors on tables, salad and condiment bars, and alongside the main foodservice line.

"This approach also reveals to the customers that flavor can be added to food items without always increasing the fat content," she said. "It is good practice to offer customers the flexibility to customize a meal or a menu item. The opportunity to allow customization supports the varied Marine palates that are served on installations."

Cuisines that Marines experience influence the condiments made available in mess hall dining rooms to personalize the flavor of a meal because the assortment is based on survey responses.

In the kitchen, however, condiments used by food service as an ingredient in recipes are reviewed annually with the menu, as well as monthly with consumer service surveys, and must adhere to nutritional obligations.

"The nutritional guidelines followed by the military will always prevail and be the driving force in fueling our Marines to meet mission," Holladay said. "However, consideration to balance both flavor and nutrient density is a constant."

#### PIZZA

Pizza is a popular Marine Corps menu item, but represents a delicate balance between satisfying nutrition guidelines and offering familiar foods that contribute to morale.

"The balance between presenting our customers



Maj. Gen. Juan G. Ayala (center-right) eats with Marines at the 24 Area Chow Hall during a visit to MCB Camp Pendleton, Calif. Ayala is the Commanding General of Marine Corps Installations Command. (PHOTO COURTESY: SGT. CHRISTOPHER DUNCAN, USMC, MCB CAMP PENDLETON, CALIF.)

with familiar ‘special occasion’ foods versus ‘everyday’ foods remains top of mind,” she said. “The frequency, however, varies by installation, but in general Marines and sailors will have the option to select this item on a consistent basis.”

Traditional and healthier varieties of pizza, including whole-wheat crust, vegetable and leaner-meat toppings are on the Marine Corps menu, as well as regional variations by location.

New pizza styles are approved through meetings and food boards before making any permanent change to the menu cycle. “We host focus groups with the Marines and our foodservice team,” Holladay said. “Feedback from the surveys and focus groups give us a signal as to the type of cuisine Marines enjoy

or would like added to our menus.”

Dining population preferences follow a cycle, but nutrient density and healthier options are always a priority. “The Fueled to Fight healthy eating initiative outlines parameters for providing better performance type foods to our customers across the globe over empty calories,” Holladay said.

Menus are consistently being evaluated to provide variety, palatability, nutrient density and acceptance from the Marine population.

Preparation methods, such as fresh, frozen and ready-made, vary depending on region. In either case, she said, “a quality product is always placed on the line.”

—GFS