Catering Calorie Labeling

An On The Menu Guide · Updated November 2026

Purpose of this guide. On The Menu, LLC provides calorie-labeling services. Use this guide to identify how each catering item is offered and to gather the item, recipe, quantity, and serving-size information needed for calorie labeling. This guide summarizes FDA labeling guidance related to catering.

1. Identify the type of catering item

Calorie declarations are required for restaurants and retail food establishments that are part of a chain with 20 or more locations doing business under the same name and offering substantially the same menu items. Each standard item listed on a catering menu, including printed, electronic, and online catering menus, needs a calorie declaration. Food served to guests at the catered event does not need calorie labels. Use the table to find how each type of catering item is declared and what information to send.

FDA Part II, Q4.1, Q5.5, Q5.13, Q5.15

Catering item	What the FDA guidance specifies	Information to provide to On The Menu
Tray or platter of individual pieces Examples: deviled eggs, turnovers, cookies, appetizers	Declare calories for the entire platter, **or** calories per individual piece and the total number of pieces on the platter (for example, "70 Cal/deviled egg, 12 deviled eggs"). If calories are declared per piece and a platter holds several types of pieces, declare each type. Sauces or dips usually served with the item are included. FDA Part II, Q5.19–5.21	Item name(s); recipe/ingredients for each type; number of each item; any sauces or dips served with it; and whether the calorie declaration is needed for the entire platter or per piece.
Assorted sandwich or wrap platter with choices	**Declare calories per individual sandwich or wrap for each variety offered.** Do not use one combined calorie value for the platter when the varieties differ. Because the mix varies, the total number of sandwiches is not required. If bread or wrap choices are offered, show calories for each choice (for example, "Turkey 110/120 Cal"). FDA Part II, Q5.22	Each sandwich/wrap variety; ingredients, fillings, sauces, and condiments; each bread/wrap option offered; standard size or weight; and portion size for each variety.
Large tray, bowl, or container sold as one item Examples: spinach dip, pasta salad, casserole, vegetables	For a multi-serving item not divided into discrete units, declare calories for the **entire item as usually prepared and offered for sale**. If the item is normally offered in discrete units, use the applicable discrete-unit approach (discrete unit and total number of units stated). Sauces usually served with the item are included. Calories per serving and a suggested number of servings may also be listed, but only **in addition to** the whole-item calories (for example, "Family-Style Salad: 1,200 Cal (150 Cal/serving, 8 servings)"). FDA Part II, Q5.19–5.20; FDA Supplemental Guidance, Q5.7	Full recipe and ingredient quantities; amount supplied (weight, volume, or container size); sauces or dressings included; whether it is sold as one complete container or portioned into discrete units; and the suggested number of servings, if per-serving calories will be listed.
Combination meal or box lunch Example: sandwich, side, and drink	Declare calories for the whole meal as usually offered. If the menu lists a choice of **two** sides or drinks, show both values with a slash ("350/450 Cal"); with **three or more** choices, show a range ("350-500 Cal"). If each component is listed on the menu with its own calories, declaring by component is also acceptable. Larger or smaller meal sizes use "adds" or "subtracts." FDA Part II, Q5.39–5.43	Every component; each option for the sandwich, side, drink, and dessert; size options; and whether components are also sold separately.

Catering item	What the FDA guidance specifies	Information to provide to On The Menu
Items with sizes, flavors, varieties, or add-ons Examples: small/large trays, cookie flavors, toppings	Each size listed by name or price is its own menu item with its own calories. List calories for each flavor or variety shown on the menu; if the menu gives only a general description, use a slash (two options) or a range (three or more). For add-ons or toppings listed on the menu, declare the base item plus each add-on ("adds ___ Cal"). Spell out "adds" and "subtracts"; do not use + or − symbols. FDA Part II, Q5.28–5.38	Each size, flavor, variety, and add-on with amounts; the base recipe; and which choices are standard and which are optional.
Self-service or buffet food Examples: soup, rice, pasta, vegetables, salad	Buffet-style items listed on a catering menu are standard menu items on that menu and need calorie declarations like any other listed item. The self-service rules below apply when food is offered self-service at the establishment itself, such as its own buffet, salad bar, or cafeteria line. Declare calories per discrete food item when sold as a discrete unit. If not sold as a discrete unit, declare calories per serving and identify the serving unit. Use a uniform scoop/ladle if one dispenses a consistent amount; otherwise use a household measure or unit of weight. If a buffet is listed on a menu, the menu must refer customers to the buffet for calorie information. **Signage:** Calories may be posted on a sign next to the food, on the sneeze guard, or on one sign listing several items by name, as long as customers can see them while choosing. The 2,000-calorie statement and the statement that additional nutrition information is available must also appear near the self-service food. FDA Part II, Q5.5, Q5.15, Q5.44, Q5.76–5.84, Q5.91; 21 CFR 101.11(b)(2)(iii)	Recipe; serving utensil and capacity, if used; standard serving measure (such as scoop, ladle, cup, or weight); the typical portion served; and how the food will be displayed (sign, sneeze guard, or shared sign).
Beverages Examples: coffee, tea, lemonade, wine by the bottle	Beverages that are not self-service: calories for the full volume of the cup as served without ice, unless a standard beverage fill or standard ice fill is used. Multi-serving beverages (such as carafes or beverage boxes) follow the multi-serving rule: the whole container, or per serving with the serving size and number of servings stated. Wine sold by the bottle and served by the glass may be declared per bottle or per glass with the number of glasses per bottle. Self-service beverages at the establishment: calories for the total fluid ounces the cup holds, with the cup size identified (for example, "140 Cal per 12 fl oz (small)"). FDA Part II, Q5.19, Q5.46, Q5.85–5.86, Q7.7; 21 CFR 101.11(b)(2)(iii)	Beverage recipe or brand; cup/container size and volume; standard fill and ice, if any; number of servings per container; whether the beverage is self-service; and any sweeteners, creamers, or mixers included.

2. Checklist: information to provide for each catering item

Please provide the following information for each item being evaluated. If a detail does not apply or a standard serving size has not been established, indicate that when sending the information. Send it to On The Menu at info@otmenu.com, or call 303-757-1333 with questions.

- ☐ **Menu item name and description.** Use the name exactly as it appears on the catering menu, including printed, electronic, and online menus. Include each variety when items differ.
- ☐ **Recipe and ingredients.** Include ingredient quantities (and brands for packaged ingredients, if possible), cooking method, and any sauces, dressings, oils, toppings, or garnishes.
- ☐ **Ingredient specification sheets.** Provide spec sheets for processed or packaged ingredients, such as sauces, dressings, breads, cheeses, and seasoning blends. Spec sheets are not needed for unprocessed ingredients, such as fresh meats, produce, and nuts.
- ☐ **Quantity supplied.** Provide the number of pieces, total batch yield, tray/container weight or volume, or another relevant quantity.
- ☐ **Serving-size or portion information.** Provide the standard piece size or weight, or the serving utensil and measure used. If no standard portion is used, describe how the food is typically served. If portions vary (for example, pieces of fish or slices of beef), tell us the average portion served (FDA Part II, Q6.3).
- ☐ **Sizes, varieties, and options.** List every size, flavor, bread, side, drink, topping, and add-on shown on the menu.
- ☐ **Packaging or service details.** Indicate whether the item is sold as a complete platter/container, divided into individual portions, or served buffet-style.
- ☐ **Changes to the item.** Notify On The Menu if the recipe, ingredients, portion size, or serving method changes after the calorie information is prepared. Calorie and nutrient information must stay current and accurate, and a recipe or portion change calls for a new analysis (FDA Part II, Q6.5).

Serving-size note

FDA guidance does not set one universal serving size for every catering dish. The serving unit must fit the way the item is prepared, offered, and sold. For buffet items, a consistent scoop or ladle may define the serving unit. If a utensil such as salad tongs does not provide a uniform amount, provide a household measure or weight where available.

Reminder: exempt items

Daily specials, temporary menu items (offered fewer than 60 days per calendar year), custom orders, market-test items (offered fewer than 90 consecutive days), and condiments for general use are exempt from calorie labeling. Items routinely offered on your catering menu need calorie declarations.

FDA Part II, Q5.2

FDA references

- FDA, *A Labeling Guide for Restaurants and Retail Establishments Selling Away-From-Home Foods – Part II: Menu Labeling Requirements in Accordance with 21 CFR 101.11* (April 2016). Question numbers in this guide refer to this document unless another source is named.
- FDA, *Menu Labeling: Supplemental Guidance for Industry* (May 2018).
- FDA, *Menu Labeling: Supplemental Guidance for Industry (Edition 2)*, draft guidance (December 2023). Draft only, not for implementation; it adds topics on added sugars and third-party ordering platforms.
- FDA, *Menu Labeling Rule Key Facts for Industry: Declaring Calories*.
- 21 CFR 101.11, Nutrition labeling of standard menu items in covered establishments.

Part II guidance | Supplemental Guidance | Draft Edition 2 | Key Facts: Declaring Calories | 21 CFR 101.11 | FDA Menu Labeling

Ready to send your catering menu?

Email info@otmenu.com or call 303-757-1333. We're happy to help.

This guide is for informational purposes only and is not an official FDA publication or a substitute for applicable requirements.