

2026

ezcater

The Workplace Cafeteria Report



The future of workplace food demands flexibility



Workplace cafeterias were built for a different era, with predictable work schedules, steady office traffic, and one-size-fits-all menus. Today, leaders operate those same cafeterias in a new reality — hybrid attendance, higher employee expectations, and rising costs — and many are rethinking whether the traditional model still makes sense.

At the same time, employee demand hasn't gone away. Workers still crave the convenience of on-site food. What's changed is what they expect from it: more variety, elevated options, and food that fits their schedule, whether they're in the workplace two days a week or five.

This year's Workplace Cafeteria Report takes a look at the challenges leaders face today and explores how flexible food programs are emerging as a smarter, more sustainable way to support employee needs while keeping costs in check.

Methodology

ezCater surveyed two key groups in 2025 to understand how workplace cafeterias and corporate dining are evolving:



1. Cafeteria decision makers:

602 leaders with knowledge of workplace cafeteria operations, including respondents who currently oversee a corporate cafeteria and those who previously oversaw one.



2. Employees:

1,000 employees who work on-site at least once per week, including respondents who currently have access to a corporate cafeteria and those who previously had access.

Section 01

**Declining cafeteria traffic
is forcing a rethink of the
entire model**



More employees are back in the office, but they're not necessarily back in the cafeteria. Among employees in our survey who currently have access to a corporate cafeteria, 60% now work fully on-site, up 15% from last year. Yet that rise doesn't translate into higher cafeteria use. In fact, 55% of decision makers who currently oversee a cafeteria say attendance has trended down, and 51% say cafeterias aren't used enough to justify the costs.

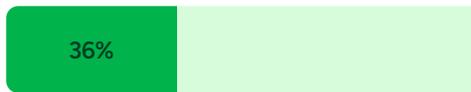
As a result, leaders aren't just tweaking menus or adjusting hours anymore. They're stepping back and rethinking the model itself.

Leaders are rethinking the cafeteria model



75%

of decision makers who oversee cafeterias say corporate cafeterias need to evolve or be reimaged

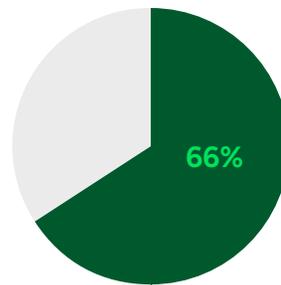


36%

say the future should include decommissioning them in favor of alternative workplace food solutions, a **39%** increase from last year

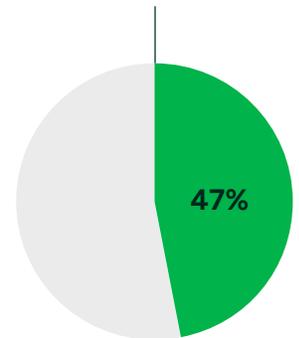


More stress, less long-term success



66% of decision makers say that operating a cafeteria is more stressful now than it used to be

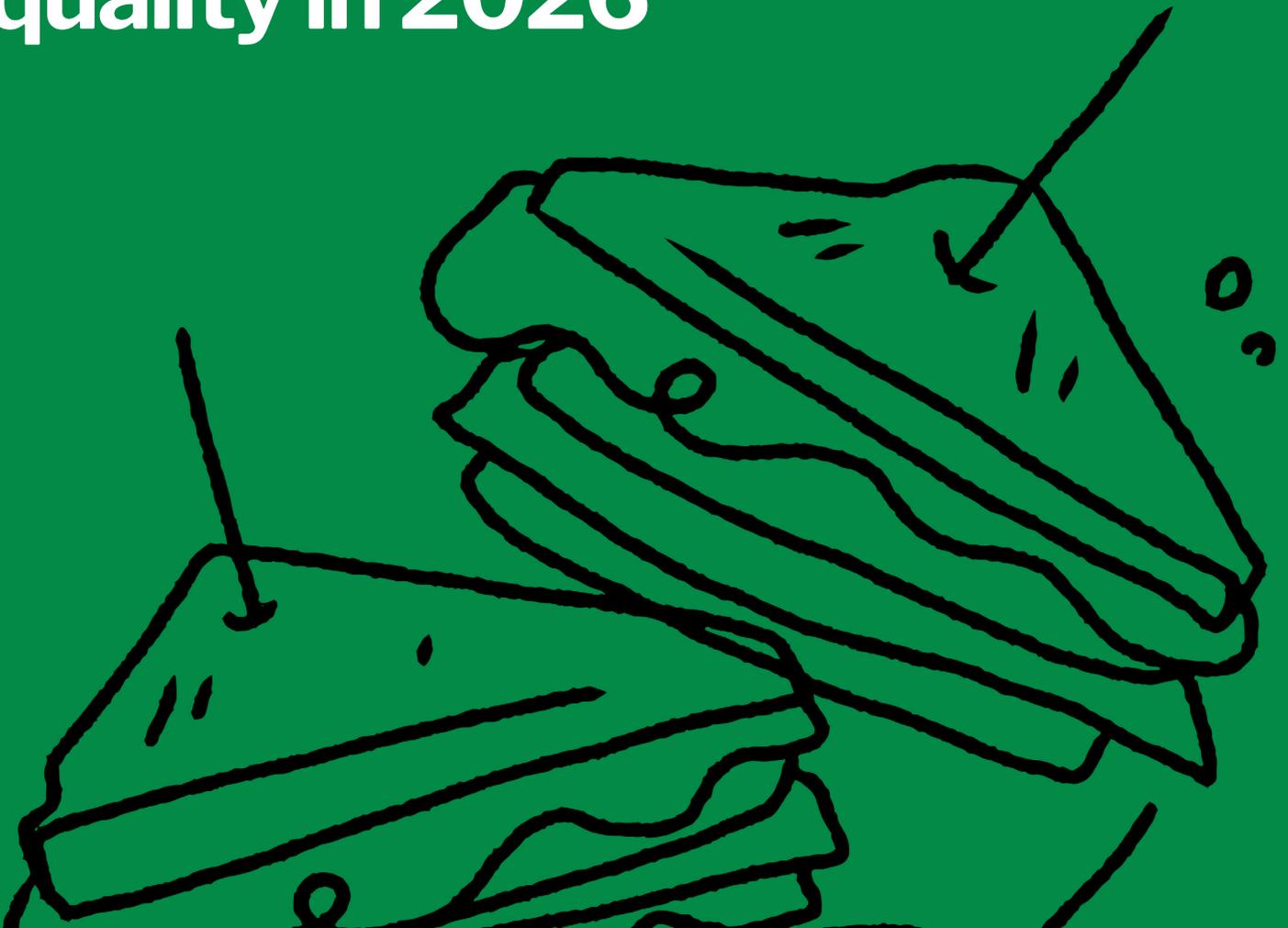
47% don't think cafeterias can operate successfully in the long term



Today's corporate cafeterias are at a turning point. The question is: what's behind the shift — and what's tipping leaders toward change?

Section 02

Cafeterias under pressure: Cost, convenience, and quality in 2026



Corporate cafeterias were built to save employees time and money and make the workday easier. In 2026, many leaders are seeing the opposite: climbing costs, longer lines, and employees who are increasingly critical of the food. That tension is forcing a closer look at what cafeterias really cost — and what they truly deliver.

Current costs outpace the benefits

For decision makers currently running cafeterias, operating costs already exceed \$1 million, and 55% expect those costs to increase in 2026 — driven largely by higher food prices (83%) and supply costs (64%).



Convenience is promised, but time and choice are lost

Corporate cafeterias are meant to make meals seamless. Yet for many employees, that convenience breaks down in the rush of the workday. Among workers with access to an on-site cafeteria, more than a third (38%) say they can't order what they truly want because they know it will take too long.

And even when employees do make the time, options can still fall short, with many reporting difficulty finding meals that fit their dietary preferences.

Inflation squeezes both operators and employees



68%

of current cafeteria decision makers say inflation has impacted their operating budgets over the past 12 months



73%

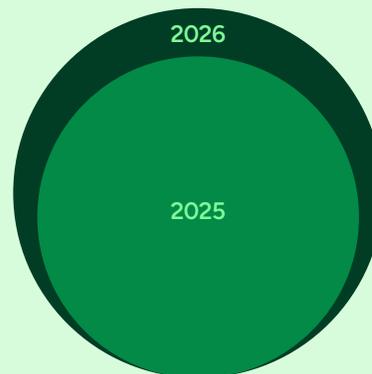
of cafeterias impacted by inflation have raised meal prices for employees



29%

of employees say they've stopped eating at their company's cafeteria because it got more expensive

More employees want healthier options from their cafeteria



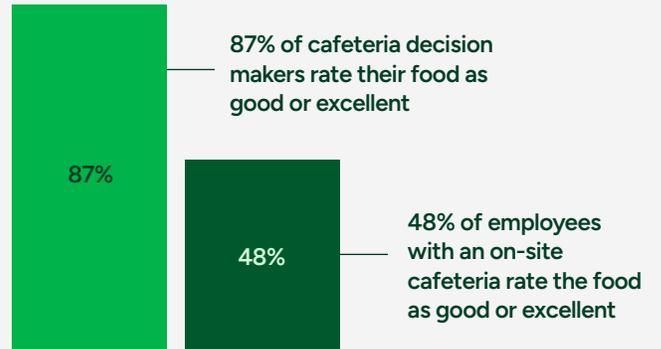
42%

of employees with an on-site cafeteria say they'd like access to healthier foods — a 15% increase from last year.

Employee perception of cafeteria food quality is falling

Beyond convenience, employees say cafeteria food quality is sub-par — and they're giving it lower marks than in last year's survey. Fewer than half (48%) of employees with an on-site cafeteria rate the food as good or excellent, a 12% drop from last year. At the same time, decision makers remain largely positive, underscoring a widening gap in how each group sees the cafeteria experience.

Employees and leaders have different views on cafeteria quality



Top five complaints of corporate cafeteria consumers

#1

Not enough variety

#2

Too few healthy options

#3

Prices are too expensive

#4

Limited hours of operation

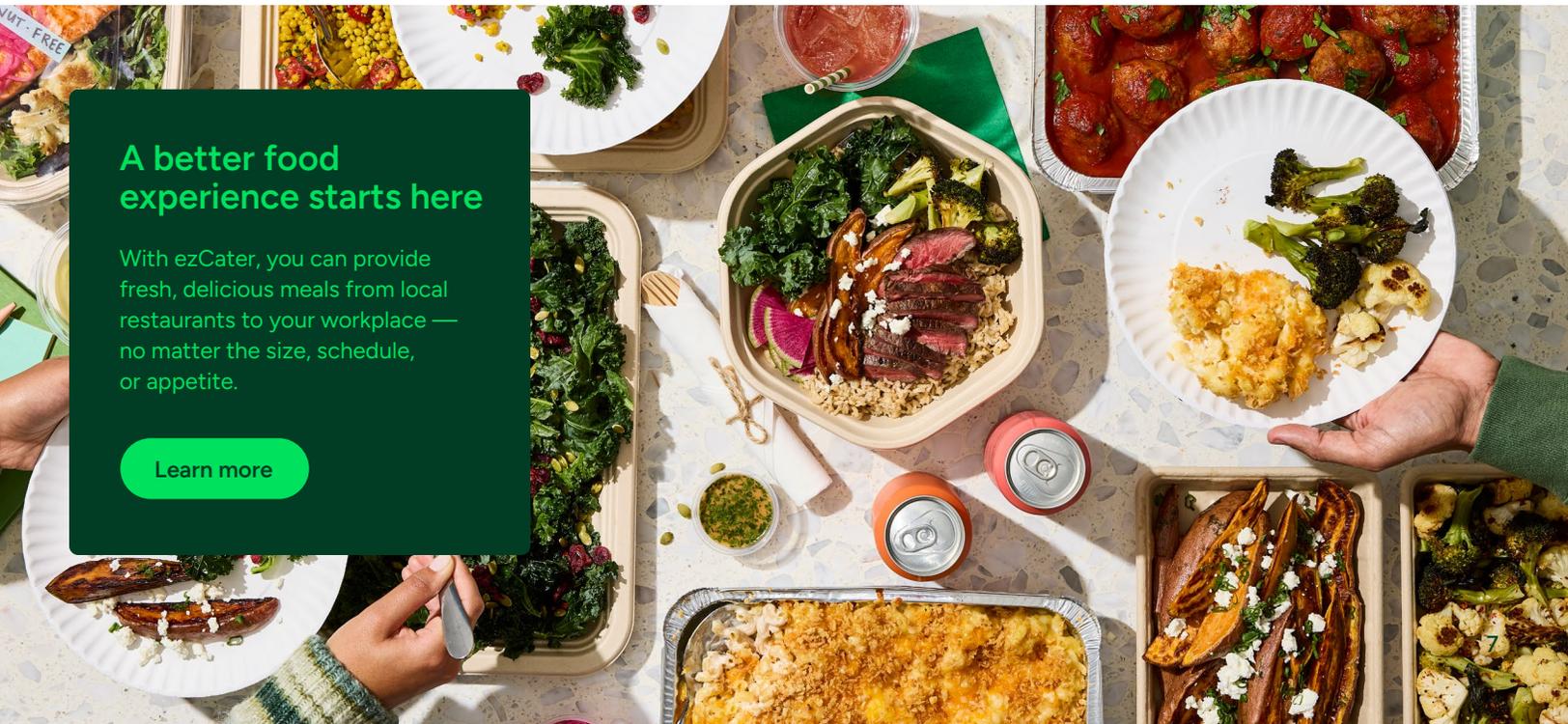
#5

Long lines and wait times

A better food experience starts here

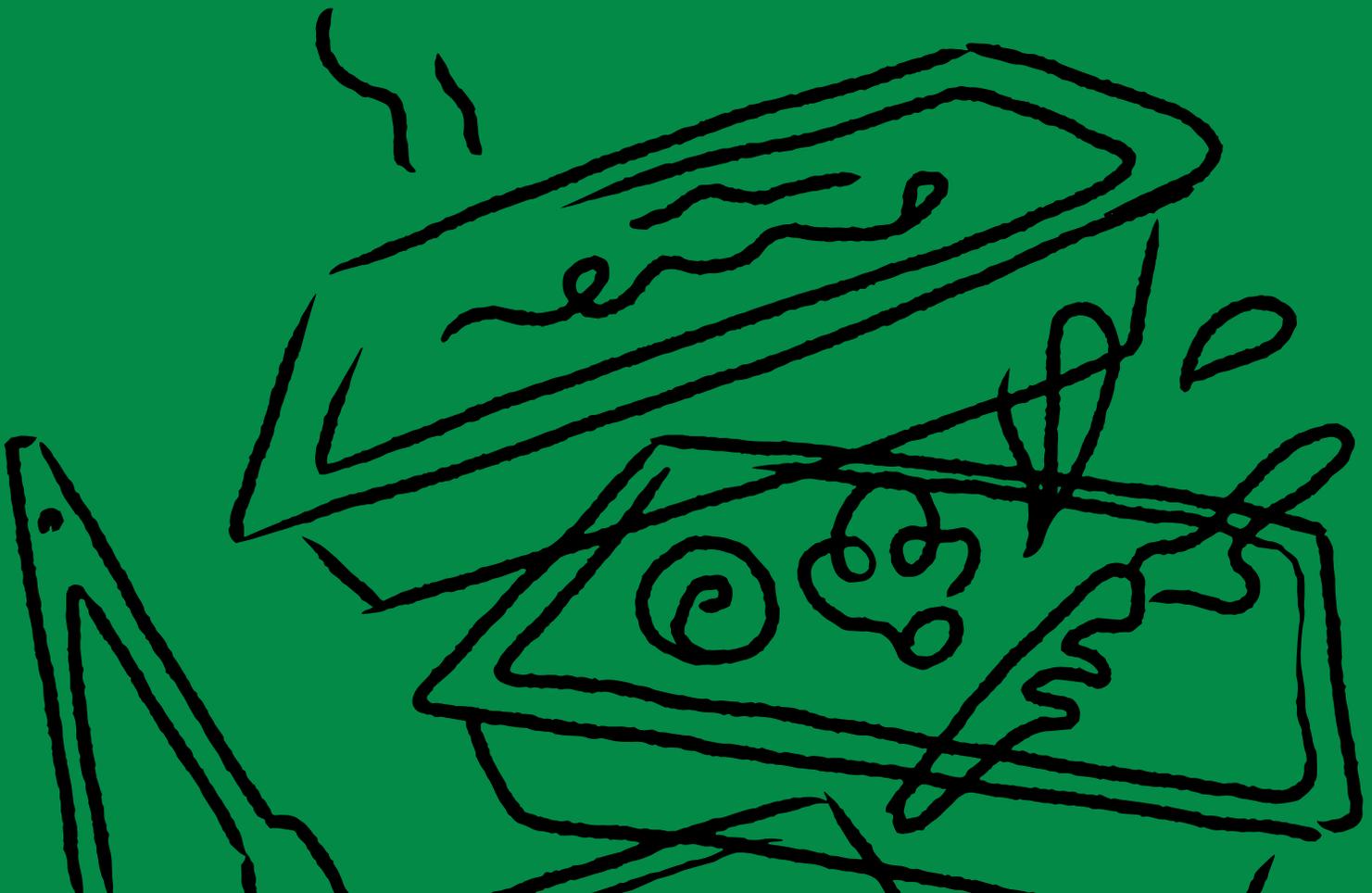
With ezCater, you can provide fresh, delicious meals from local restaurants to your workplace — no matter the size, schedule, or appetite.

[Learn more](#)



Section 03

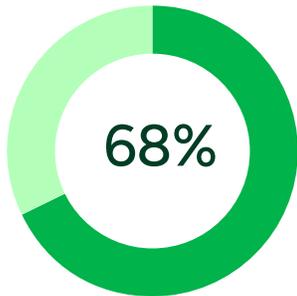
Hybrid work continues to highlight cafeteria limits



The workplace has settled into its hybrid rhythm. While foot traffic varies by day and by team, expectations for quality, variety, and value keep rising. At corporate cafeterias, the cracks show up fast in reduced hours, increased food waste, and a model that grows harder to justify. And hybrid leaders feel the tension directly.

Among those overseeing a cafeteria in a hybrid work environment today, 67% say their food program decisions are influenced by the goal of bringing employees on-site, yet fluctuating headcounts make consistent use difficult to maintain.

Hybrid schedules make cafeterias harder to run



68% of leaders overseeing a cafeteria in a hybrid work environment say hybrid schedules make it challenging to operate — a 12% increase from last year

These challenges are prompting more leaders to question whether the traditional cafeteria model still fits a hybrid workplace.



“Since offering food through ezCater’s meal program, we’ve noticed an increase in office attendance. Employees are more motivated to come in when they have access to convenient, quality meals.”

Alisa Marsingill, Employee Relations Partner at Thales

Shrinking cafeteria hours reduce usage

When fewer employees show up — or show up unevenly — many organizations cut cafeteria hours and menus, which further limits usage and satisfaction. Among decision makers who oversee cafeterias today, 51% say they’ve reduced operating hours due to lower employee use. As hours shrink, employees miss meals and look elsewhere for food, reinforcing a cycle of declining cafeteria usage.

Fluctuating attendance fuels food waste

Inconsistent attendance doesn't just impact cafeteria traffic — it increases food waste. Among all surveyed decision makers, 65% believe cafeterias waste a lot of food, and among hybrid leaders, 63% say headcount fluctuations are a key reason. Waste adds cost without adding value, which is the exact opposite of what cafeterias were built to do.



Restaurant-powered meals drive attendance

Among leaders who currently oversee a cafeteria in a hybrid workplace, 80% say meals from nearby restaurants would encourage onsite work more than cafeteria food.



Flexibility wins in a hybrid workplace

Flexibility is no longer a nice-to-have. Among leaders who currently oversee a cafeteria in a hybrid workplace, 64% say it should be replaced with a more flexible employee food option.

Section 04

**The opportunity:
Rethink workplace food
with flexible solutions**



The traditional cafeteria isn't keeping pace with today's workplace. Employees want better food, while leaders need to deliver stronger value. Flexible food solutions offer a way to meet both needs — a shift today's leaders clearly recognize. In fact, 82% of decision makers who currently oversee a cafeteria say flexibility is critical to modern workplace food management.

Give employees better food options, without leaving the office

The traditional cafeteria model doesn't need to disappear — it needs to evolve with the times. After all, employees still value on-site convenience. Among those who currently use a cafeteria, 67% of employees say they do so because they don't have time to go off-site.

What's changed is how they judge the food itself. Cafeteria meals are increasingly compared to restaurant options — and consistently come up short. In fact, 76% of employees who currently have access to a cafeteria say restaurant food is tastier than cafeteria food, a 9% increase from last year.

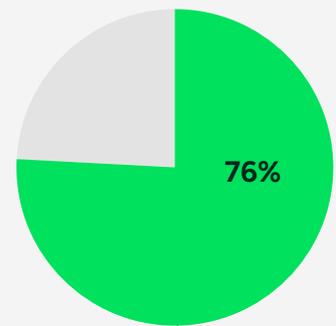
Free, restaurant-powered meals are a powerful on-site draw

When high-quality restaurant food is brought on-site, employee behavior shifts significantly: 63% of hybrid employees say they'd come in on days when food is free, demonstrating the power of visible, valuable food benefits to drive on-site attendance among today's teams.

Modern, restaurant-powered models like ezCater's meal program make it possible to upgrade food quality and choice without sacrificing the convenience employees rely on.



Employees prefer restaurant-powered meal programs



76% of employees say they'd prefer a program like ezCater's meal program, where they can choose individually packaged meals from local restaurants delivered to the office, over a traditional cafeteria.

Ready to test a restaurant-powered meal program at your workplace?

[Explore our meal programs](#)

Make food subsidies visible as a real employee perk

When companies subsidize cafeteria meals, the value doesn't always land with employees. Too often, subsidies are buried in pricing or tied to a narrow set of options, so the benefit feels invisible. When employees can clearly see how much of their meal the company is covering, they're far more likely to recognize — and appreciate — the perk.

At the same time, leaders know the cafeteria alone isn't enough in a hybrid world. Among those who oversee a cafeteria, 70% say they wish they could supplement it with delivery from local restaurants. Many turn to a workplace food platform like ezCater to enhance their cafeteria, adding more choice, variety, and flexibility without taking on the operational lift themselves.



Make food access consistent and equitable

Many leaders are juggling a mixed reality when it comes to workplace food. 71% of decision makers who oversee a cafeteria are also responsible for offices that don't have one. Among these leaders, 95% say they see value in offering supplemental food options across their locations.

A modern workplace food program should feel fair, no matter where someone works. That means creating a consistent experience whether a site has a full cafeteria, a micro-kitchen, or no on-site food at all. With ezCater, leaders can extend flexible restaurant meals to every office, so employees get the same standard of choice, convenience, and control — regardless of location.

NorthPoint Development cut meal costs 35% by replacing its cafeteria with ezCater

When NorthPoint Development relocated its corporate headquarters, the team had to decide whether to invest in renovating an on-site cafeteria, or rethink the way they provide food for their hybrid workforce.

They chose ezCater.

Rather than taking on the expense (and hassle) of a remodel, NorthPoint reimagined corporate dining with flexible lunch options from local restaurants. With ezCater's employee meal program, NorthPoint now provides free daily lunches to more than 300 employees across 10 office locations nationwide — at a 35% lower cost than their previous cafeteria model.

[See full case study](#)

“

We looked into remodeling the existing cafeteria, but due to cost and overhead, it seemed more logical not to. ezCater saved us from having to renovate the space, hire staff, handle state licensing, and more.”

Melissa Allinder, Director of Operations,
NorthPoint Development



Ready to rethink your cafeteria? So are we.

Upgrade to flexible food options from local restaurants that scale by office, day, and demand with ezCater.

Why ezCater?

- Access to a nationwide network of 100,000+ local restaurants
- Centralized invoicing and reporting across teams and locations
- Fast to launch and simple to manage, with no contracts and low overhead
- One partner for multiple meal solutions — from recurring employee programs to meetings, events, and ad-hoc group orders

If you're ready to reimagine your corporate cafeteria, [connect with ezCater today >](#)

