



# Navigating Relief & Current Realities

## A Strategic Guide for Minnesota Restaurants

Prepared in partnership with Performance Foodservice Minnesota and Hospitality Minnesota

### A Note from Angie

**Here's a number worth celebrating: \$4.05.** That's the average price of a gallon of gas in Minnesota right now — up over a dollar from last year and still climbing. For our industry, that is genuinely good news.

The family that was going to drive to the Dells? Reconsidering. The couple eyeing a long weekend in Chicago? Doing the math. What they're discovering is that Minnesota has everything they're looking for — great lakes, beautiful resorts, world-class food and hospitality — without the road trip. That's you. That's your patio, your dining room, your destination property two hours from the metro.

This month, in partnership with Performance Food Group, we're talking about how to build a menu and a promotional strategy that turns that curiosity into a reservation — and a reservation into a regular.

### Your Menu is the Invitation

When someone is deciding whether your restaurant or resort is worth the trip, **your menu is doing a lot of the convincing.** It needs to feel like it belongs somewhere — not just anywhere. It needs to tell them they made the right call before the food even arrives.

The way you get there looks a little different depending on who you are:

#### Metro Operators: Make Staying Home Feel Like Getting Away

Your guests had a choice tonight. They could have ordered delivery and watched TV. They chose you — which means your job is to make them feel like they actually went somewhere. Think about the full arc: something exciting to start, a menu that has a seasonal point of view, a beverage program that's clearly been thought about, and at least one signature item that's yours and nobody else's. When they leave, they should feel like they had an experience, not just a meal. That's what brings them back — and what they tell their friends about.

#### Outstate & Destination Operators: Own Every Hour of the Stay

Your guests already love you — they drove two hours to prove it. Now think about how to extend that love across the whole trip. The welcome drink when they arrive. The dinner that's clearly the main event. The Sunday brunch that makes them push checkout as late as possible. Each touchpoint is a menu moment and a revenue opportunity. The thread connecting all of it should be place — regional ingredients, local flavors, a menu that could only exist where you are. That's what turns a one-time trip into an annual tradition.

#### Both Markets: The Stuff That Actually Moves the Needle

- **Name where your food comes from** — a one-line callout on the menu ('sourced from [local farm]') adds perceived value immediately and gives guests a story to repeat
- **Invest in your beverage program** — a signature cocktail, a seasonal feature, and a genuine NA option aren't extras anymore, they're expectations. And they move check averages.
- **Build for lingering** — shareable starters, a dessert worth splitting, a reason not to rush. Staycationers are in vacation mode. Let them stay in it.
- **Call your PFG rep before you finalize the menu** — knowing what's in season and available locally means your specials are timely, compelling, and cost-effective all at once



### Limited Time Offers (LTOs): The Easiest Revenue You're Not Capturing

Most operators know they should be running limited time offers. Most operators also don't do it consistently. Here's the thing — it doesn't have to be complicated. One new featured item or menu moment per month. Promoted the week before it launches and the week it's live. That's the whole playbook.

Done right, LTOs give your regulars a reason to come back before they were planning to, and give first-timers a reason to try you right now. Both of those are worth a lot this summer. Your PFG rep can help you build specials around what's in season so the timing feels intentional and the cost structure works.





# Minnesota is the Destination: Winning the Staycation Summer

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### Your Summer LTO Roadmap - May Through August

- **MAY:** Celebration season. Mother's Day and graduations give guests a built-in excuse to splurge. Match that energy with something that feels a little elevated — a premium shareable, a special dessert, a cocktail that fits the moment. Give people something to order for the table.
- **JUNE:** Welcome to Summer. This is your menu identity launch. New seasonal ingredients, a fresh point of view, and a name or theme that has a personality guests will remember and repeat. Make it feel like a debut.
- **JULY:** Peak season, peak boldness. Lean into what people want most in the height of summer — big flavors, patio-friendly formats, something fun and shareable. This is not the month for subtle. Make it worth posting.
- **AUGUST:** The 'last of summer' urgency is real — use it. A feature that signals the season is winding down gives guests a reason to squeeze in one more visit. Bonus points if you start teasing fall flavors. It creates anticipation and makes regulars feel like insiders.



### 90 Days of Reasons to Celebrate – Use Them

The calendar is basically writing your marketing plan for you right now. You don't need to invent occasions — you just need to show up for the ones that already exist. Here's what's coming:

- **Mother's Day (May 10)** — The single highest-volume dining day of the year in most markets. Book early, staff up, and build something worth the occasion. Don't wing this one.
- **Armed Forces Day (May 17)** — A genuine appreciation moment that lands especially well in outstate communities. Simple and meaningful.
- **Memorial Day Weekend (May 23-26)** — Summer starts here. If you have a patio, this is its grand opening. Make noise about it. If you're a destination operator, this is your first big drive-market weekend.
- **Graduation Season (all month)** — Private dining, group bookings, and catering. Reach out to local schools and families now, before someone else does.
- **Father's Day (June 15)** — Consistently underplayed by operators who already spent their energy on Mother's Day. That's your opening. A simple, well-promoted offer goes further than you'd think.
- **Juneteenth (June 19)** — A meaningful opportunity for community connection and culturally rich programming that your guests will notice and appreciate.
- **Fourth of July Weekend** — One of the biggest revenue weekends of the year, full stop. Patriotic specials, extended patio hours, fireworks-viewing packages if you've got the location for it. Go big.
- **Mid-July:** Start seeding fall now. A harvest preview or early fall menu tease builds anticipation and keeps your regulars curious about what's coming next.

### The Bottom Line

Minnesota is a destination. This summer, more people than ever are going to figure that out. Make sure when they do — they find you.

As always, we're in your corner.



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**Angie Whitcomb, IOM**

President & CEO  
Hospitality Minnesota

D: (651) 925-4011  
C: (612) 210-3090  
angie@hospitalitymn.com

[www.hospitalityminnesota.com](http://www.hospitalityminnesota.com)

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