



**ez**cater

# The Food for Work Report

The growing role of food in today's workplace



# Modern workplaces are evolving — and so is food for work

When it comes to food for work, employees are **always** hungry for more: more variety, more flexibility, and more opportunities to connect with coworkers. New research from ezCater reveals that as businesses embrace both hybrid and fully on-site work, food has become the main attraction.

From recruitment to retention, companies are spending more on food for work, flexing to meet the needs of the modern workforce. Beyond traditional catering orders, food is being delivered in the form of grab-and-go meals, recurring employee meal programs, and even restaurant pop-ups.

At the same time, ezCater survey data has found great news for employers: **food drives business results.**

While food for work is evolving, it continues to have tangible impacts on businesses small and large. This report will explore the new food formats, reveal emerging trends among corporate orderers (and employees), and look ahead toward the future of food for the workplace.

## The key takeaways from this report are:



Food powers higher-quality work, enhances employee engagement, and serves as an attractive recruitment and retention tool.



Employer-provided food drives more value at a lesser cost compared to other workplace perks like education and wellness benefits.



Free food at work saves employees considerable time and money, making them feel more positive about their company.



Direct-from-restaurant orders continue to pose challenges, encouraging orderers to seek newer formats (and more variety) of food.



## Methodology

To understand the evolution of food for work, we surveyed four key groups during the first half of 2024:

### Food for work decision makers:

A survey of 600 workplace experience leaders at companies that provide free or subsidized food to employees

**Food orderers:** A survey of 600 people who regularly order food for their workplaces

**Employees:** A survey of 1,005 people who work on-site at least one day per week and whose employers provide free or subsidized food

### Cafeteria decision makers:

A survey of 601 workplace leaders at companies with an on-site cafeteria and knowledge of workplace cafeteria operations

Combined, these data sets let us take a broad view of current food for work trends and see the impact of food in the workplace.



INTRODUCTION

# Food for work is on the rise (and taking new shapes)

New ezCater research reveals that the balance between remote, hybrid, and fully on-site employees is shifting.

Compared to 2023, the fully on-site workplace is growing. While around one third of businesses have settled into hybrid in 2024, more than 90% of all employees now work on-site at least two days per week. Not to mention, one in four business leaders plan to increase in-office days for employees in 2025 according to new research from [Resume Builder](#).

## Food remains a powerful tool for driving on-site attendance.

A whopping 88% of business leaders say providing food encourages employees to work on-site, and hybrid employees agree. In fact, 67% of hybrid workers say that free food encourages them to work in-person.

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## Food is the foundation of on-site attendance

Free or subsidized meals attract employees to the office

**88%**

**of business leaders  
say providing food  
encourages employees  
to work on-site**





CUSTOMER SPOTLIGHT

## How SeatGeek saw a 5X increase in on-site attendance

When event ticketing site SeatGeek used ezCater to provide lunch to their hybrid workforce, they hoped the free food would encourage more on-site attendance. They were right. Five times more employees showed up to work in person, driving collaboration and connection over the lunch table.

[See case study](#)



## What does this mean for food for work?

Now that more employees are clocking in on-site, companies are spending more on food in the workplace. According to ezCater research, 53% of corporate orderers are spending more on food.

However, old-school cafeterias may no longer meet the needs of modern workplaces. 26% of cafeteria decision makers expect that cafeterias will be decommissioned, and 62% believe that flexible employee food options should simply replace them.

Today's employers are now in need of alternative food and beverage solutions. So, it's no surprise that recurring employee meal programs are on the rise — 32% year-over-year, to be exact. As modern workplaces move to find more efficient ways to fuel employees (and high-quality work), the way meals are provided requires a more innovative approach.

## Food spend is up, but the future of cafeterias is uncertain

With more employees on-site, food for work is expected to take new shapes

**26%**



of cafeteria decision makers expect to decommission cafeterias

**62%**



of cafeteria decision makers favor replacing cafeterias with flexible food options



# 01

**Food is a powerful  
driver of employee  
engagement  
and retention**





More than ever before, employers are embracing food as a key differentiator in today's labor market. Feeding employees not only powers workplace satisfaction, but it also has noticeable impacts on engagement, recruitment, and ultimately, retention.

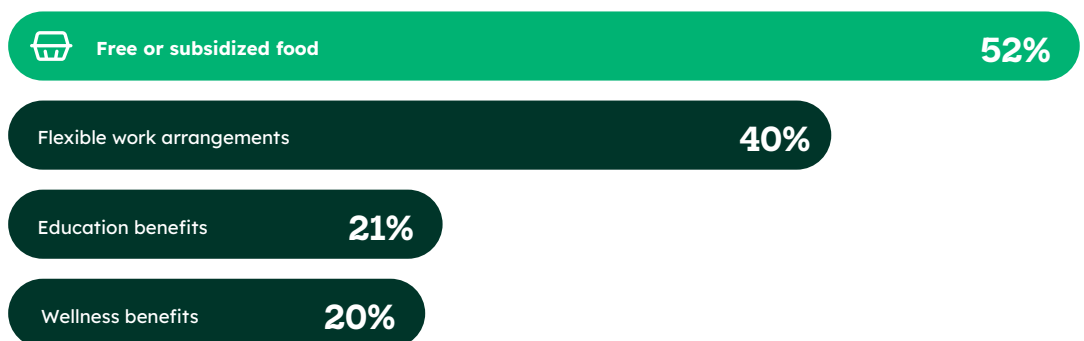
## Food is still the most appreciated work perk

Continuing the trend from last year's survey, compared to other work perks, free or subsidized meals continue to top the list. While free food certainly encourages on-site attendance, it can also be a huge influence

on employee satisfaction. Nearly 90% of employees surveyed by ezCater said that free food makes them feel more positively about their company.

### Food remains the #1 work perk

Food tops the list of company perks most appreciated by employees, year after year



### CUSTOMER SPOTLIGHT

## Daily meals feed employees and drive engagement at NorthPoint Development

When commercial real estate operating company NorthPoint Development wanted to boost their employee engagement in a meaningful way, they decided to use food — and turned to ezCater for help. They saw more than their engagement increase — NorthPoint reported exponential growth in their employee satisfaction rates, all through a recurring meal program.

[See case study](#)





## Food is a frequent recruiting tool

With so many employees citing free or subsidized meals as their preferred work perk, it's no wonder that food is increasingly used as a recruitment tool. Corporate orderers tell ezCater they call out subsidized daily or weekly meals (59%) and free coffee or snacks (45%) to entice applicants.

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## Food is the new main attraction for applicants

More corporate orderers are including food on job listings and career pages

Use of food perks for recruiting purposes by orderers



## Employers that offer free food have the competitive edge

Attracting top talent isn't the only challenge in today's job market. Employee retention is also top of mind. Around 46% of professionals [surveyed by Microsoft and LinkedIn](#) say they're thinking about quitting in 2024, up 40% from 2021. With so many employees considering leaving their positions, businesses are questioning how to retain them.

**Food can be the answer.** According to ezCater research, 78% of orderers say that food makes employees more likely to stay at a company, a 13% increase from 2023. As voluntary turnover continues to impact businesses, employers that offer free food gain a competitive edge.

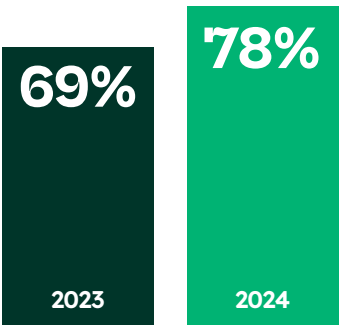
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## Food is playing a more significant role in retention

According to orderers, the role of food in retaining employees is growing



Orderers say food makes employees more likely to stay



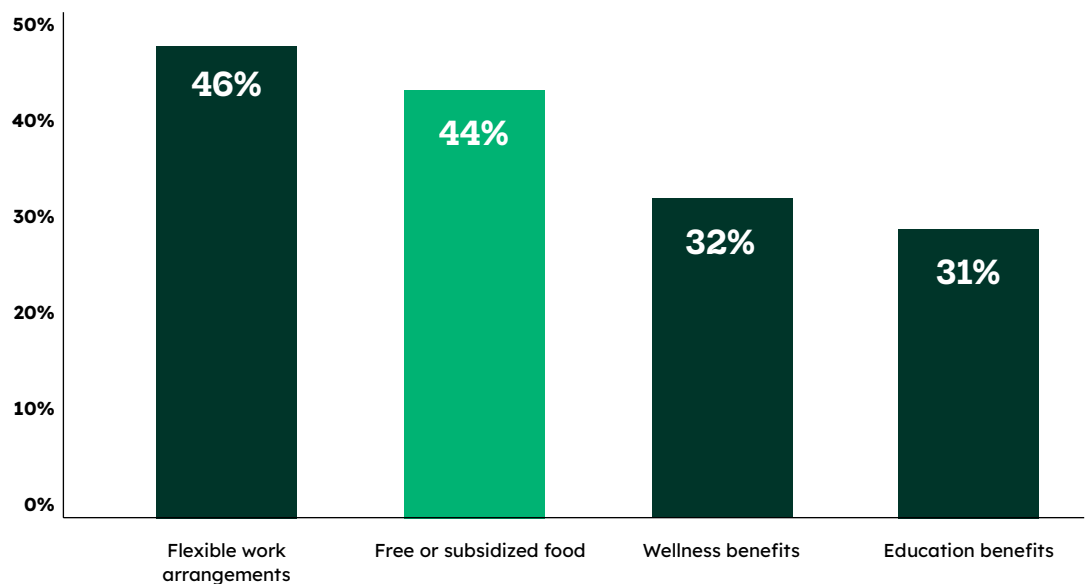
## Food is one of the most valuable perks an employer can offer

Food isn't just influential — it's a powerful and cost-effective way to reward employees. Of employers who invest in food to encourage onsite collaboration, 88% say attendance **increases by at least 50%** when food is

provided, pushing business goals forward. In terms of value, free or subsidized meals offer more bang for their buck than other perks.

## Food continues to power a strong return on investment for employers

How food orderers rank the value of workplace perks relative to cost





# 02

## Employees need better food options





What's one good reason why employees say free or subsidized food is their most preferred work perk? **They eat better.** And not just better, but they also skip fewer meals and make healthier choices with daily or weekly employer-provided food at work.

### Workers without access to employer-provided meals make less healthy choices





However, employees miss out on more than just meals when they don't receive free or subsidized food. More than 40% of employees without access to employer-provided meals say they spend their break traveling to get food, losing valuable time they could be using to eat and recharge or connect with colleagues.

Employees also spend a good deal of money on food. Two thirds of employees say they spend at least \$10 on lunch, meaning that the average full-time, in-office worker will spend \$2500 a year on food for work.

## Employees say free food at work saves them time and money

Top three reasons employees enjoy receiving a free meal at work

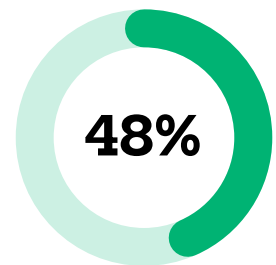
SAVES THEM MONEY



SAVES THEM TIME



GIVES THEM A REAL BREAK



## The right food options benefit employees in more ways than one



**Two-thirds of employees say free food helps offset the cost of their commute**



**On average, employees spend \$2500 per year on lunch when they work in-person**

**30 minutes**

are saved in an employee's workday when employers provide food

# 03

## New models of food for work are emerging





Whether it's keeping up with daily headcounts or communicating with restaurants, orderers have their hands full when sourcing food for work. Fortunately, new models are taking shape to simplify the process for individual orderers and company-wide meal programs.

**With the future of cafeterias uncertain, companies need alternative food solutions.**

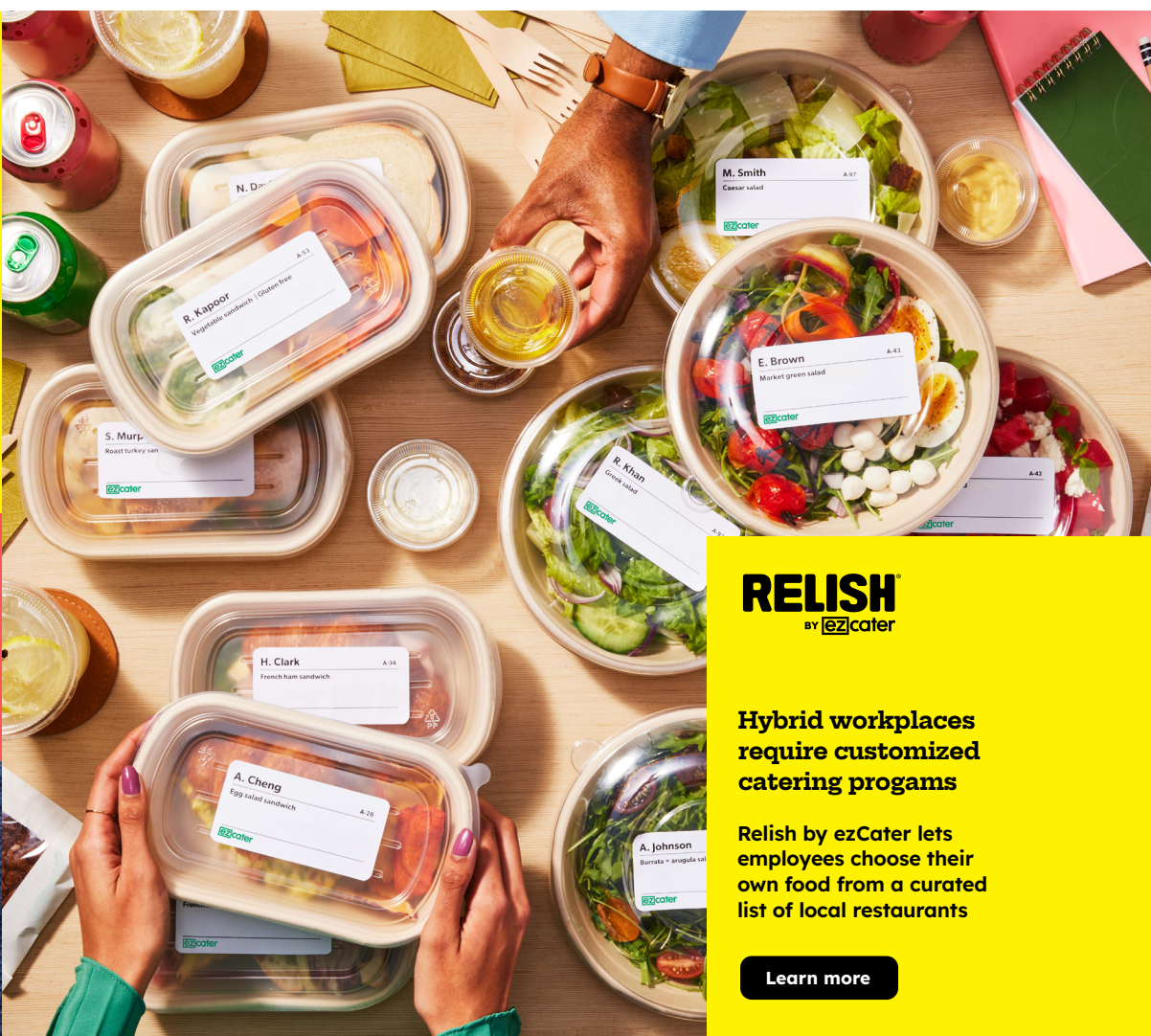
Corporate cafeterias used to be the heart of the workplace. Today, with average operating expenses that exceed \$1 million, more than half of cafeteria decision makers feel that cafeterias are too costly to operate. And 39% believe they aren't used enough to justify the expense.

As such, many business leaders are taking steps to evolve. The golden age of cafeterias are being replaced with an era of flexibility. Flexible food solutions, like **Relish by ezCater**, can be a complement or alternative for outdated cafeterias with individual employee meals sourced from local restaurants. Food options can be scaled up or down to meet headcount, providing more variety to employees through a rotating list of local menus.

Companies need more flexible food solutions

91%

of cafeteria decision makers think a scalable, recurring employee meal program would be useful for their workplace



**RELISH**  
by ezCater

**Hybrid workplaces require customized catering programs**

Relish by ezCater lets employees choose their own food from a curated list of local restaurants

[Learn more](#)

## Business orderers need easier, more efficient food solutions

The individuals tasked with ordering food at work juggle countless other responsibilities, from managing people and employee benefits to meeting with clients and maintaining office supplies and equipment.

Orderers are often looking for ways to make their jobs easier. As it stands, they say ordering directly from restaurants isn't as convenient or efficient as it could be.

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### Ordering directly from restaurants can come with challenges

Top issues orderers say they've encountered:



Navigating complicated menus is time-consuming, as is playing phone tag with a busy restaurant when there's an issue with an order. Plus, only having access to a handful of go-to restaurants limits food variety, a

particular pain point for frequent orderers. Why is this important? For one thing, 76% of corporate cafeteria users wish they had a better variety of food options at work.

## Employees would rather order their own food — and employers are happy to oblige (and pay)

Beyond the challenges of catering directly from restaurants, finding food everyone will like (34%) and finding options that meet specific dietary needs (30%) are two of orderers' biggest challenges. This is due in part to the variety of restrictions, preferences, and allergies in modern workplaces.

With the sheer range of dietary requirements in the average workplace, it's no wonder why most employees (71%) would simply prefer to choose their own food. Individual meals, particularly those with dietary needs

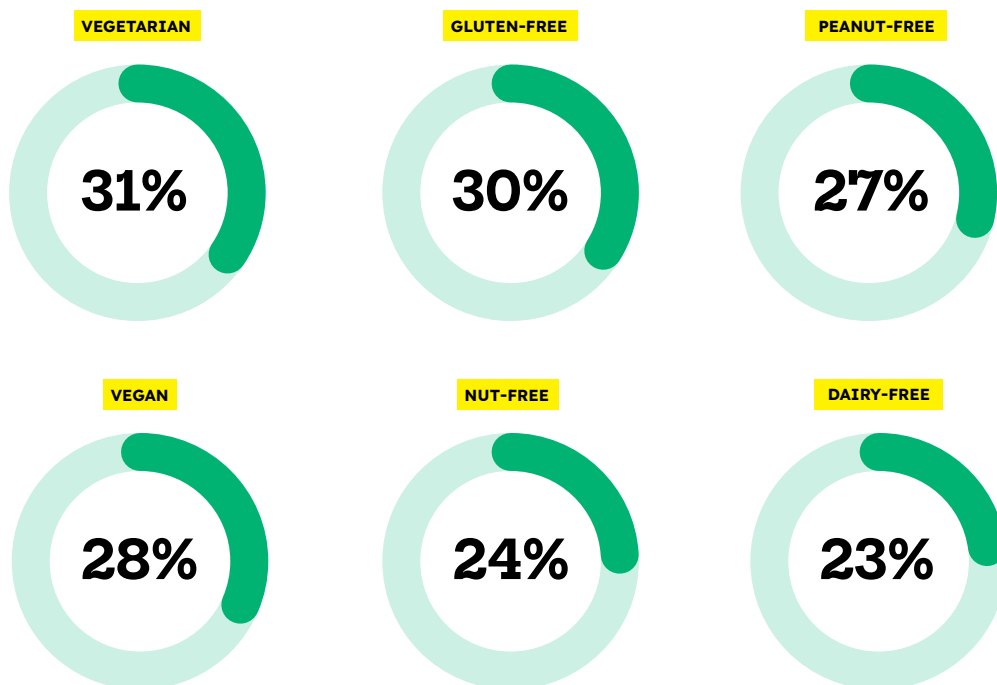
clearly labeled on the packaging, allow for far greater food accessibility.

Rather than one person selecting food that aims to please everybody, employees select a meal that appeals to them. This emphasis on individualized meals makes recurring employee meal programs, like [Relish by ezCater](#), increasingly necessary in the workplace. Group Ordering, another ezCater feature, also conveniently eliminates guesswork for orderers.

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## Eaters' dietary needs can make group orders complicated

Top dietary requirements orderers consider when ordering food for the workplace





# 04

## What's next in food for work?



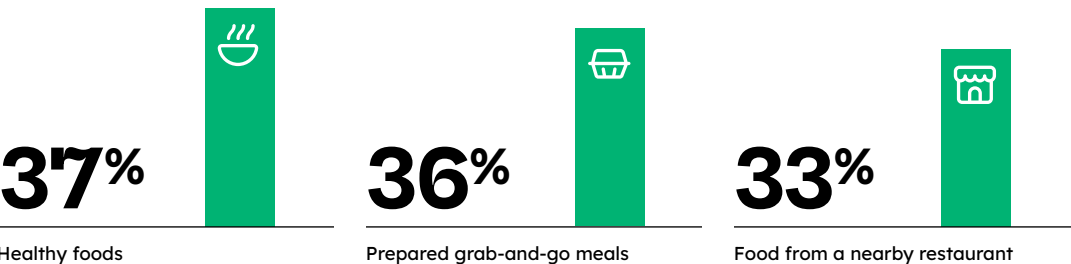
TREND 1

Companies want to bring in new food concepts — and expand in key areas

From healthy foods to grab-and-go meals, employees have weighed in on the new variety of food they'd like to see at work. More than 20% of workplace experience leaders have taken note, indicating they'd like to add special breakfasts, food trucks, and fresh fruit and produce.

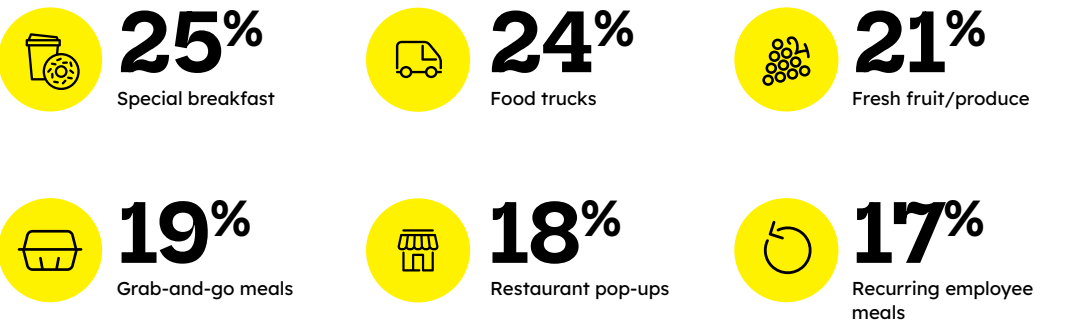
Employees want more food options

Employees with a corporate cafeteria are interested in having better access to these types of food options:



Emerging food for work opportunities

Workplace decision makers are looking to bring these new options to the table





**TREND 2**

**Companies want to support locally owned restaurants and those owned by members of underrepresented groups**

Given the choice, the majority of orderers prefer to source food from locally owned businesses rather than national or chain restaurants. However, many organizations have also adopted company-wide mandates to steer food budgets toward locally owned restaurants.

**Food for work is trending local**



The same could be said of supporting local restaurants that are owned and operated by members of underrepresented groups. While 37% of orderers prefer ordering from restaurants owned by members of underrepresented groups, 27% identify this as a company requirement.

One way some companies bring diverse cuisine to the workplace is by ordering from local restaurants owned by members of underrepresented groups during cultural holidays. In fact, according to ezCater survey data, 50% of orderers prefer serving different types of cuisine for cultural holidays.

TREND 3

**Companies would like to use fewer vendors for their food needs**

Looking ahead, companies are striving to streamline vendors — and that includes corporate food vendors. As a matter of fact, one in five (21%) corporate decision makers are focused on vendor consolidation in 2024. Now, many companies are seeking one solution for their food for work needs.

**1 in 5**

decision makers are focused on vendor consolidation in 2024







# Drive ROI and boost employee satisfaction with better food options

The data doesn't lie: As more employees are being asked to come into the office, companies nationwide plan to spend more on food.

Fortunately, food is the corporate perk that employees just can't get enough of — and for businesses, food provides some of the best value for the cost.

While new models of food for work begin to take hold, it will be up to corporate orderers and decision-makers to not only experiment with new types of food perks, but also to find the means to do so more effectively.

Enter the role of scalable workplace food solutions like ezCater. ezCater helps simplify ordering food for work, from recurring employee meals to one-off meetings and events. With one convenient dashboard, it accommodates fluctuating headcounts, offers convenient menu filters that help cater to dietary preferences, and lets companies centralize and manage their food spend.

# Ready to take food for work to the next level?

Connect with ezCater today >



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