

EQUIPMENT SOLUTIONS

Covering equipment and trends for successful foodservice operations

by James J. Hodl

LESS LABOR, LOWER COSTS

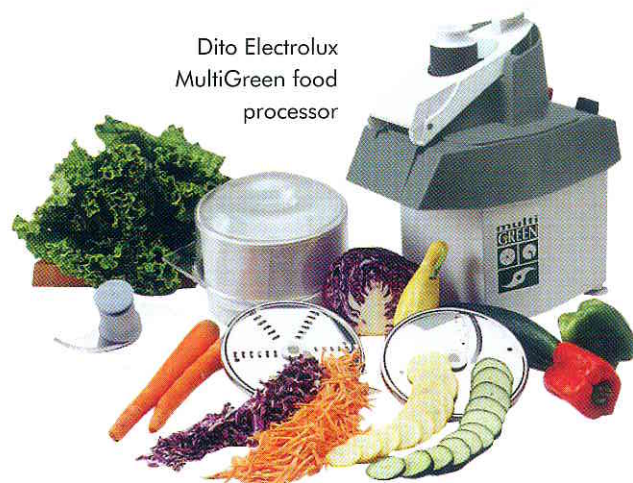
Equipment and tools to help restaurants make better use of employees' time

Often it is the little things that determine how profitable a restaurant is. And in the current economy, the need to minimize costs is paramount. The best way to control costs is to minimize labor requirements by trimming the time required by employees to perform certain tasks—if not cut down on tedious tasks all together. An employee who can perform a task quicker or not at all can be utilized elsewhere to perform additional tasks. And this can result in a restaurant kitchen running

smoothly with fewer employees.

Recognizing this need, manufacturers currently offer a broad array of equipment and tools to achieve these desired time, labor and cost savings.

When celebrity chefs appear on television, they often display their kitchen acumen by taking a carrot, celery stalk or similar vegetable and with rapid strokes of a chef's knife cut it into tiny pieces. But that ability comes with much practice. And in most restaurant kitchens,



Dito Electrolux MultiGreen food processor

these cutting and slicing tasks are performed by assistants with much less on-the-job experience using knives and thus work slower.

Single-stroke manual tools

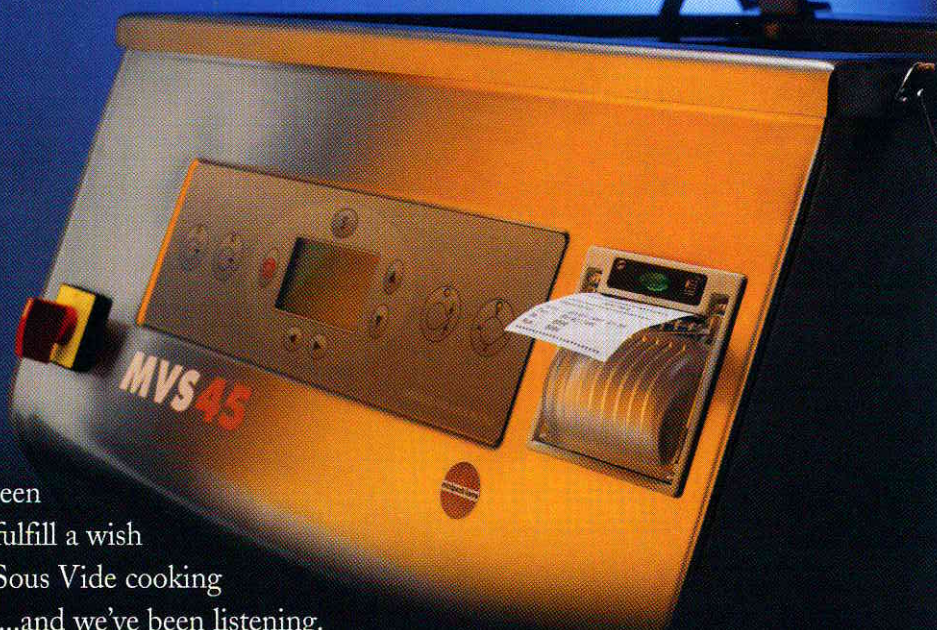
To bring these staffers up to speed and keep prep work flowing while greatly reducing the risk these less experienced workers might cut themselves, several manufacturers offer a broad selection of one-stroke manual cutting and slicing tools. As these tools require no electricity to operate, savings can be realized on utility bills.

The latest manual tool is the Easy Pineapple Corer/Peeler from Hicksville, Ohio-based Nemco. Pull down on the handle, and the device's blades shear off the entire outer shell into three large pieces while taking the hard core out of the middle, leaving the juicy fruit to be sliced into rings or cut into cubes for use on salads, in desserts or as an exotic topping on pizza. Besides trimming prep time, this device also minimizes food waste that can occur when working with a manual knife, according to Nemco.

The broad manual tools line from Nemco also includes the Easy LettuceKutter, which can turn a fresh head of lettuce into salad bar-sized slices in seconds. The tool comes with special blades for chopping romaine lettuce, slicing melons and cutting cooked chicken into 3/8-inch slices. A companion cutting board is available.

With one swift motion of its ergonomically designed handle, the Easy FryKutter turns potatoes into 1/4-, 3/8- and 1/2-inch French fries ready to be dropped into bubbling hot oil. This tool also comes with grids for slicing carrots and celery; chopping onions, peppers and tomatoes; and wedge-cutting steak fries and tomatoes to top hamburgers. This tool can be counter- or wall-mounted. In the latter installation in many In-N-

Sous Vide Dream Machine

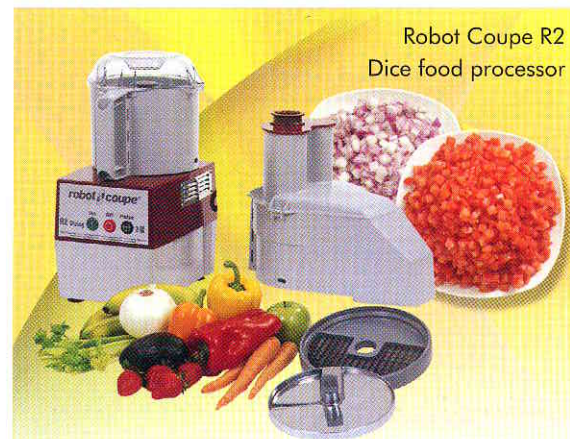


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Out Burger outlets, this tool is positioned in full view from the front counter so its use can entertain and instill awe in customers waiting to place their orders.

Companion tools are the Spiral Fry Cutter, which converts fresh potatoes into curly fries, and the Ribbon Fry Cutter, which turns the same spud into ribbons. Both position the potato between a screw-attached piston and a blade, so as the crank is turned, the spud is slowly spun into the blade, cutting it into long specialty shapes.

Similarly, Nemco's Green Onion Slicer Plus speeds the processing of green onions into 3/16-inch slices in less time than with a knife or scissors. The device also can be used to quickly slice cucumbers, green bell peppers, mushrooms, olives, strawberries and bananas.

Fried onion blossoms are making a comeback in restaurants of all sizes, thus boosting sales of Nemco's Easy Flowering Onion Cutter. Rather than performing intricate work with a paring knife, one simply places a colossal-size peeled onion in the device's cup, and then pulls the lever, which moves down the blades to create the special cut. After removal, one needs only to gently separate the "petals" before adding batter and breading and deep-frying it.

Another new one-stroke tool from Nemco is the Easy Chicken Slicer, which cuts cooked chicken into 3/8- and 1/2-inch strips for use in chicken salads, sandwich wraps and chicken strip menu entrées. With this tool, the cutting motion is created by pulling down the hinged lid as one would a waffle maker, forcing the chicken onto the cutting grids.

Would you believe a manual device exists for precision-slicing prosciutto ham? Troy, Ohio-based Berkel Co. offers the Model 330M Prosciutto Slicer that with the turn of a flywheel cuts this dense Italian ham into the paper-thin slices connoisseurs claim maximizes the flavor, according to Berkel. The model 330M is preferable over motorized slicers as it uses no electricity between orders and requires no time to get up to slicing speed once the meat needs to be freshly sliced. And performing the slicing within eyesight of customers adds entertainment to the dining experience.

Among labor-saving manual tools from Dito Electrolux, Fort Lauderdale, Fla., are the CT Se-

ries Tomato Slicers. This catapult-shaped tool requires only that the tomato be placed in the holder so that a lever can be quickly lowered, and the sharp blades can quickly slice the vegetable with a minimal loss of juice. This device anchors to countertops with suction cups.

Dito Electrolux's DTA tool cuts tomatoes, oranges, apples, lemons and limes into uniform segments for cocktails, salads, for tea service, and myriad other uses. Blades will cut these items into 4, 6, 8 or 12 segments using a blade cup that is moved down onto the fruit by deft manual action on the top lever.

Mechanized tools

For more detailed tasks, one can save time and labor by going with a mechanized tool.

The R2 Dice food processor from Robot Coupe USA, Jackson, Miss., specializes in turning vegetables into tiny cubes of 8, 10 and 12 mm, depending on which dicing plate is used. With a continuous-feed ability, this device can dice enough vegetables for 270 servings in about an hour. With a 2-hp single-phase motor that spins cutters up to 1,725 rpm, the R2 Dice also comes with cutting plates for slicing, shredding, grating and julienning vegetables. And optional attachments also can purée, blend and mix foods, as well as knead dough.

The MultiGreen food processor from Dito Electrolux is designed specifically for processing raw vegetables for salad bars. One simply inserts vegetables into the loading hopper, and a piston presses them against cutting discs and grids spinning at up to 1,500 rpm to quickly slice, shred or grate them before dropping them into a 2 1/2-liter bowl.

Still more time can be saved using Berkel's Model 705 Tenderizer/Stir Fry Cutter. Rather than having a kitchen staffer pound meat with a wooden mallet, the chore can be performed in one short pass through the two rollers, 86 blades and 1,118 cutting edges in this motorized device to produce a uniform tenderizing pattern that ensures a juicy piece of meat when cooked. It also knits meats to produce a larger hunk from two smaller pieces. With the Stir Fry Cutter Basket assembly, this device also cuts meats into

uniform 10- or 13-mm strips for use in Oriental and other cuisines.

Features of the Model 705 include a 1/2-hp, one-speed motor and an electromagnetic interlock that ensures safe operation but shuts the device down when the cover is raised.

Ask any kitchen staffer in a seafood restaurant, and they'll tell you one of the most miserable tasks is shucking oysters and other shellfish. The Proshucker Power Shell Separator from Nemco reduces the task to a quick three-step process. A high-torque motor rotates a cone-shaped bit that when introduced to the hinge of an oyster gently pries the shells apart. As the shells separate, the user slides a dull-bladed knife across the inside top of the shell to cut the adductor muscle to remove the meat. And the mud and shell particles that might normally end up in the meat are instead automatically evacuated out the back. This pedal-activated device can open up to a dozen oysters per minute, and without the risk of cuts from the knives with manual shucking.

Staffers can spend less time in getting glasses of ice water to tables with the Camrack IceExpress Glass Filler marketed by Cambro Manufacturing, Huntington Beach, Calif. This grid-like device funnels ice cubes directly into 25 glasses at once, which not only greatly minimizes spills and drips, but also reduces glass breakage and the risk of contamination.

Labor requirements also can be reduced in the cleanup process by using some innovative equipment that minimizes the need for employees to spend huge chunks of time getting pots, pans and tableware washed after cooking and dining is finished.

One issue facing all restaurants is getting silverware sparkling clean. Place forks, knives and spoons slightly



Nemco
Spiral Fry

Berkel model 330M
Prosciutto Slicer



by the water friction and pump motor during the agitation process), it has no heating element to consume additional electricity and raise utility bills. And the device requires only 12 gallons of water every 8 hours, thus trimming water and sewer bills.

After a 6-minute wash, the silverware will subsequently come out of its single pass through the warewasher gunk-free, according to the company.

Power Soak also has introduced an upgraded version of its Power Soak potwashing system with an Intelligent Control that adds extra features to the device. This system eliminates the need for kitchen staffers to spend long periods scouring burnt-on soils and grease from all types of restaurant cooking vessels. Placed in the unit's tub, the Power Soak agitates the heated water into a continuous rolling motion that functions as a hands-free scrubbing action.

off kilter in the rack, and some gunk might remain after it passes through a warewasher. Should those incompletely cleaned silverware reach the table and the customers spot it and complain, future business can be lost.

Rather than assign staffers to pre-clean silverware or check it afterward, restaurants can use the Power Soak Silverware Pre-Washing System from Power Soak Systems, Kansas City, Mo. This stand-alone appliance creates a vortex action in the compact tub that vigorously pulls water through the silverware to loosen and pull away dried-on and baked-on food soils, even from between the tines of forks. As this device is self-heating (it recycles heat generated

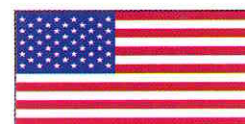
With the new PS-250 Intelligent Control, the unit monitors wash and sanitizing temperatures, and provides LED prompts when wash water needs changing or the sanitizer tank needs refilling. New options include an "Add Time" feature that extends washing time by 15 minutes, as well as an over-

night deep-cleaning cycle. This latter cycle is aided by a three-head chemical dispenser for adding wash and sanitizing chemicals as required. And when a problem occurs that requires employee attention, the Wash Action Lock-Out kicks in, and an appropriate LED light on the control panel flashes.

Manufacturers directory

- Blendtec Co., (800) 253-6383, www.blendtec.com/commercial
- Dynamic Mixers USA, (800) 267-7794, www.dynamicmixersusa.com
- Electrolux Professional, (866) 449-4200, www.electroluxusa.com/professional
- Hamilton Beach Commercial, (800) 572-3331, www.commercial.hamiltonbeach.com
- Robot Coupe USA, (800) 824-1646, www.robotcoupeusa.com
- Varimixer, (800) 222-1138, www.varimixer.com
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