



En Route International supplies light-touch meal boxes

FORGING THE FUTURE OF INFLIGHT FOOD SERVICE

by JANE HOBSON

With the future of inflight food service still up in the air, these companies are pivoting to keep pace with the turbulent climate

Light as a feather flatware

[Sola Netherlands](#) is introducing a range of super light-weight cutlery. The steel, 0.5-millimeter-thick cutlery was in development before the pandemic as Sola was preparing for the EU regulations against plastics.

“We reinvented a concept solution to the plastic problems and [have now] adapted it to a solution for this extreme challenge,” Sola Netherlands Export Manager Hans Engels tells *PAX International*. “Despite all the restrictions and distancing that will come and go, service is the one thing people both want and indeed need.”

With original plans to introduce the range in Hamburg being delayed, Engels says the company has used the opportunity to ensure the cutlery will be useful to airlines as they adjust to inflight food service in the post-lockdown cabin. The washable, recyclable Featherlite range adheres to environmental restrictions and is offered in three designs which makes it suitable for various service styles.

Packaging perspective

[En Route International](#) has launched ‘light-touch’ snacking and meal solutions for airlines as they transition to carrying passengers again.

The range includes boxes with snacks, water and hand sanitizers, and some that include more substantial meal varieties, such as frozen sandwiches. There is also a range of wrapped bakery items and cheese for premium cabins. As part of the company’s Four the Future environmental initiative, the box board packaging is sourced from new and recycled material and can again be recycled after use.

“Based on our research and discussions with carriers and caterers, all inflight stakeholders appear to be looking for products that are easy to serve, limiting crew and passenger interaction, whilst also minimizing the use of rotatable equipment that needs to be handled during pre- and post-service activity,” says Executive Director Hamish Cook. “By working collaboratively with all the relevant parties, we developed a product that we feel is suited to the period ahead of us.”

Along with its sealed disposable cutlery and condiment packs, inflight clean up kits and aprons, [WK Thomas](#) recently developed a new single-serve box meal solution that holds a film-sealed hot entrée, cutlery, drink and dessert to provide its airline customers with a safe inflight food service option.

When asked how the environmentally conscious company is balancing sustainability with these new products, WK Thomas’ Head of Travel David Simpson tells *PAX*, “Hygiene

Global Inflight Products' trolley trash bag hangs on the end of the trolley for efficient clean up without unnecessary handling by flight attendants



and sustainability are not mutually exclusive. Sustainability remains a key focus at WK Thomas' and all of the fantastic work and product development that was done prior to COVID-19 will not be undone during this pandemic."

With 25 years' experience supplying onboard products, [Global Inflight Products](#) (GIP) predicts pre-packaged food and bottled water will become more common post-pandemic.

"As food safety will become an even more visible top priority, attractive meal boxes will be essential," says GIP Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Lisa Benzaoui.

Benzaoui predicts a sealed, compact meal box with factory-sealed snacks or fresh items will center as one of the best ways to ensure quality and food safety with minimal passenger interaction required with the flight crew. This will also make trash collection easier at the end of the service since all of the components can be safely enclosed in the meal or snack box, she adds. The GIP trolley trash bag, which hangs on the end of the trolley, offers an efficient way for passengers to drop their items in the bag without any further handling by the crew.

Convenient condiments

[Le Must](#) is preparing for a year of hopeful expansion into aircraft cabins. The single-use, USDA Organic certified condiments are suited well for First and Business Class post-pandemic cabins because they are equipped with a temper-evident seal and are imported directly from Europe to the airline with minimal touch points, Moshe Cohen, Le Must Managing Partner and Creator, tells *PAX International*. They also suit the passenger who would generally enjoy organic, sustainable, high-end condiments, he adds.



Le Must single-use, USDA Organic certified condiments are equipped with temper-evident seal and imported directly from Europe

The company is also prepping for the launch of its artisan preserves line in the next few months. The preserves will be made true to authentic preserve recipe - with sugarcane and cooked quickly in copper cauldrons to retain the freshness of the fruit.

While developing new service concepts for its airline customers, [gategroup's deSter](#) brand has been focusing on creating low-interaction solutions that maintain the company's dedication to sustainability, says Philippe De Naeyer, Director Sustainability and Product Development. Mostly due to hygiene safety and efficiency, the industry tends to use more single-use items than reusable ones, De Naeyer explains, therefore, the deSter concepts look to alternative materials to single-use plastics, such as the paper cutlery wraps replacement and the use of other materials including fibers, paper, wood and bamboo.

"The close interaction between all of our in-house designers, engineers, product developers and material experts allows us to quickly adjust to the changing market and to create new products to respond to immediate needs," Creative Director Ruud Vanderheyden tells *PAX*.

Worry-free warewashing

Meanwhile on the ground, services like warewashing are also taking a hit. But as Tomas Jämtander, [Diskomat](#) Marketing Director Flight Catering Solutions, says, inflight food service will continue to play a vital role for airlines when flights resume.

"Whether a low-cost carrier with limited onboard service or an airline with a comprehensive meal service offering, the drive towards materials that require warewashing will continue to rise," he tells *PAX International*.

Wexiödisk washers sold by Diskomat are rigorously tested: water flow, wash patterns, stipulated water temperatures throughout all zones. This combined with good hygiene practice and a well-managed HACCP plan in the catering unit eliminates the possibility of the novel coronavirus being present within the machine itself, Jämtander says, extinguishing concerns for contamination in the warewashing process.

Diskomat has received an increase in inquiries for touch-free handling alternatives in warewash operations, Jämtander says, highlighting the Wexiödisk cutlery washer with automatic cutlery sorting machine. "It's an innovative installation that is 100 percent touch-free and hygienic from start to end."

Digitized in the new world

For Australia-based [QA Chef](#), providing digital food safety traceability systems to catering facilities is a must now more than ever. Via its handheld Q-Pack device, QA Chef eliminates the need for manual validation of ingredient shelf lives and temperatures, minimizing data entry at every Critical Control Point from ingredient to customer.

The QA Chef system gives the caterer complete digital visibility across all critical food safety data - that would normally otherwise be recorded on paper and subject to inaccuracies, says David Cox, Founder and CEO. QA Chef can record the IDs of all workers in the chain of food preparation, and all HACCP records for a specific dish can be recalled at the press of a button if there is a concern.

"At the end of the day, passengers just want to know they are safe at all points of their journey, including when they eat their meals," says Cox. [PAX](#)