

Safe gluten-free service isn't about perfection; it's about protocol. This playbook gives operators a practical, step-by-step framework for serving gluten-free guests with confidence, from sourcing to service.

CULINARY DRIVEN. PROVEN PERFORMANCE.

Hungry for more? We'd love to hear from you!
sales@smartflourfoods.com | www.smartflourfoods.com | Smart Flour Foods, 2418 Spring Lane, #5232, Austin, TX 78703

The Operator Playbook for Gluten-Free:
A Practical Guide to Doing It Right

Serving gluten-free guests well is not complicated, but it does require intentionality. The difference between a gluten-free program that builds loyalty and one that creates risk comes down to the same thing every time: protocol.

This playbook is built for real food service environments. No separate kitchen required. No special equipment. Just a framework that protects your guests and protects your business.



1 Source Products You Can Stand Behind

The first decision is the most important: what product is on the plate?

A certified gluten-free product, one that has been third-party tested and certified by an organization like GFCO, removes the guesswork at the sourcing level. Certification means the product itself meets a defined standard. It gives your team a verifiable claim to communicate to guests.

Not all gluten-free products are certified. Not all certified products are equal in quality. The goal is a product that is certified, performs well in your kitchen environment, and tastes like something guests would actually choose; not just something they'd tolerate.



2 Map Your Cross-Contamination Risk Points

You don't need to eliminate wheat from your kitchen to serve gluten-free safely. You need to know where your risk points are and manage them.

Common risk points:
- Shared fryer oil
- Shared toasting equipment
- Prep surfaces used for wheat-containing products
- Utensils, tongs, and gloves that have contacted gluten
- Airborne flour in high-volume bakery or pizza environments



For each risk point, document your protocol: What do you do before handling a gluten-free order? Who is responsible for verifying it? What does guest communication look like?

You will not eliminate all risk. Your job is to minimize it and be transparent about what you can and can't guarantee. (Spoiler alert: guests are used to this and are impressed with the operators that cater to them!).



3 Train Your Front-of-House Team

Your server is the guest's first point of contact with your gluten-free program. They need to be prepared.

Training should cover:
- Which items are gluten-free and why
- What certification means (and how to explain it simply)
- How to route a GF order correctly
- What to say if they're not sure: "Let me check with the kitchen for you" is always better than a guess
- How to communicate honestly about cross-contamination risk

Sample language for servers: *"We use GFCO-certified products for our gluten-free items and have protocols in place to minimize cross-contamination. We do prepare wheat-containing items in the same kitchen, so we can't guarantee a completely wheat-free environment, but we take it seriously."*



4 Make It Easy to Find on the Menu

Your gluten-free program doesn't work if guests can't find it. Mark items clearly, both in-house and on your digital menu. Use consistent labeling. Consider a small symbol or callout that's easy to spot when someone is scanning.

Guests who can identify GF options before they sit down arrive with more confidence. That confidence makes the meal experience better — and the review they leave more positive.

5 Build the Feedback Loop

Great GF programs improve over time. Build simple feedback mechanisms:
- Train staff to flag and document any GF-related guest feedback
- Monitor reviews for GF mentions
- Check in periodically with regular GF guests; their experience is your best quality control

READY TO PUT THIS INFO TO USE?

Use the following pages to guide you in beginning your excellent gluten-free program.

HOW TO AVOID **CROSS CONTAMINATION**

INGREDIENTS

Check to make sure the ingredients you are using are gluten-free. Look at both the ingredients list and for the "Certified Gluten-Free" logo.

Certified GF Gluten-Free

ADDITIONAL SAFETY TIPS:

- Color code gluten-free foods so that there is no question which foods do not contain gluten.
- Make a list of all gluten-free foods that are found in the restaurant/food-prep kitchen.
- If the same ingredients are used in gluten containing AND gluten-free foods, be sure to keep the amounts used for gluten-free segregated.

FOOD PREP

Make sure the area in which you are preparing gluten-free foods is clear of gluten containing foods & utensils (aprons & towels). Having a dedicated space will help avoid cross contact.

ADDITIONAL SAFETY TIPS:

- Wipe down the counter tops with cleaner or soap & water.
- Remove all gluten containing foods & storage from the entire food prep area.
- Be sure to use ALL new cooks' tools (knives, cutting board, gloves, apron, etc.)

CLEAN HANDS

Staff should wash their hands thoroughly before handling gluten-free foods, with soap and warm water. After cleaning hands, avoid touching the faucet as it could be contaminated.

ADDITIONAL SAFETY TIPS:

- Wash hands and forearms before handling gluten-free foods.
- Dry hands off with a new, clean towel that has not come in contact with gluten containing foods.
- Do not touch anything other than gluten-free foods and cooks' utensils after washing hands.

FOOD STORAGE

Have separate storage bins for gluten-free foods, as well as a separate storage area. This will help avoid confusion on which foods are gluten-free, and which foods are not.

ADDITIONAL SAFETY TIPS:

- Have an area that is dedicated to gluten-free foods.
- Use clear containers to store food so that staff can see what is in each bin. Color code the gluten-free storage bins so that the staff is aware those bins are gluten-free.

TOOLS & UTENSILS

The cooks' tools and utensils used to prepare and cook gluten-free foods need to be different from those used with gluten containing foods.

ADDITIONAL SAFETY TIPS:

- Buy separate cooks' tools and utensils for gluten-free foods.
- Label the gluten-free cooks' tools and utensils with a color coding system.
- Place cooks' tools and utensils in a separate area from those utensils that are used with gluten containing foods.

SAMPLE **DISCLAIMER LANGUAGE**

In addition to taking precautions in the kitchen, it is also recommended to add a disclaimer to your menu. This is meant to inform the diner that their gluten-free meal (although precautions have been taken) has been prepared in a shared kitchen with wheat and other gluten-containing ingredients.

Here are a few examples of disclaimers used in other restaurants:

- *Our gluten-free options are prepared in a common kitchen with the risk of gluten exposure. Guests with gluten sensitivities should exercise judgment in consuming those foods.*

- *We are not a gluten-free restaurant and cannot ensure that cross contamination will never occur. We have processes in place to minimize that happening, but there is a great deal of gluten in the air and on our work surfaces.*

- *We advise against gluten-free options for extreme gluten intolerances; cross-contamination may occur.*

- *Gluten-Sensitive designations are based on information by our suppliers. In our kitchens, Gluten-Sensitive items may come into contact with surfaces, grills, utensils or other equipment that have previously contacted an allergen, including gluten.*



To call out specific gluten-free items, many restaurants place a "GF" beside meal options, have a section of the menu that is called out/dedicated to gluten-free items *or* have a completely separate menu. Any of these options are appropriate and are highly appreciated by gluten-free guests.

Hungry for more? We'd love to hear from you!
sales@smartflourfoods.com | www.smartflourfoods.com | Smart Flour Foods, 2418 Spring Lane, #5232, Austin, TX 78703



CULINARY DRIVEN. PROVEN PERFORMANCE.

Hungry for more? We'd love to hear from you!

sales@smartflourfoods.com | www.smartflourfoods.com | Smart Flour Foods, 2418 Spring Lane, #5232, Austin, TX 78703