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# How Flying Food Group is growing with the times

By **Rick Lundstrom** on March, 31 2020 | Catering



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Executive Vice President of Airline Sales and Marketing Nicolas Rondeau

With the year 2019 winding down, Chicago-based [Flying Food Group](#) put the final touches on a year that saw expansion and infrastructure improvements like no other time in the caterer's 37-year history.

When the decade ended, Flying Food Group had spent more than US\$100 million to retrofit and upgrade operations at units from the East Coast to Honolulu, all while prepping for the opening of its new unit in San Francisco later this year.

It may be happening just in time. The US is still the largest commercial aviation market in the world. It is a sure bet that the international airlines Flying Food Group has built its reputation on serving will grow and expand networks, knocking on the door of major cities in the United States. Though international travel has slowed recently due the coronavirus outbreak, the demand for airline catering<sub>1</sub>

is expected to grow significantly from now to 2025.

By the halfway point in this decade, the worldwide airline catering industry is expected to hit US\$24.75 billion in annual sales, according to a report from [ResearchAndMarkets](#), a well-known industry watcher. In this period, it will increase at a compounded annual growth rate of 5.7 percent in lockstep with increased business and leisure travel.

“Airline caterers are increasingly making efforts to match passenger expectations, in terms such as collaborating with celebrity chefs for creating multicultural and customized menus,” said a preview of the report.

The latter demand falls neatly into Flying Food’s unique capabilities. For decades, Flying Food Group has sought to create menus for a diverse group of international customers flying into the United States. To meet future demand, more than 140,000 square-feet of operational space has been added at three units. At facilities in both Honolulu and Los Angeles, Flying Food streamlined operations by integrating two catering units into one. At Honolulu Airport (HNL), the company launched a major program with [All Nippon Airways](#) catering two A380 flights per day. The A380 service launched May 2019 and expands to daily flights in July. The double-deck, 520-seat aircraft is fitted out with passenger bars and multi-purpose passenger area.

During the course of 2019, Flying Food Group announced new and expanded customer relationships that will have its team of chefs producing meals for Asian, North African, Italian and Turkish travelers, all looking for a taste of home on their return trip. Most recently the company announced in February it is now catering Irish flag carrier [Aer Lingus](#) at six locations in the United States for the airline’s service to Dublin.

Aer Lingus has been a customer at Flying Food Group’s Hartford facility (BDL) since 2016. Early this month, Aer Lingus switched to Flying Food Group catering at: Chicago (ORD) for two daily flights; Miami (MIA) for three flights weekly; Orlando (MCO) for four flights weekly (six flights weekly in summer); Seattle (SEA) for five flights weekly and Washington D.C. (IAD) with one flight daily.

### **Millions for improvements**

To set up for the expected renovation and development, Flying Food Group planned for two years, Nicolas Rondeau tells *PAX International*. Rondeau is the Executive Vice President of Airline Sales and Marketing. Permanent and regional contractors were called on to do the work at four stations. And all of it had to be done without missing a meal or a flight.

“The coordination between our local operations team and the construction companies on how the work would advance was a key factor to making it a success,” says Rondeau. One example was at Flying Food’s new unit in Honolulu, which is across the street from the old unit. The project was completed in phases when possible, but the final changeover had to take place overnight. The new unit at HNL opened in March of last year. The new single unit at HNL handles airline and retail customers through a 90,000 square-foot facility. Among its largest customers is the aforementioned All Nippon Airways and [Hawaiian Airlines](#).

Another place where Flying Food consolidated two facilities into one was at Los Angeles International Airport (LAX). The unit opened in December of 2019 at 100,000 square feet which added 30,000 square feet to the caterer’s capacity in the big market.

In addition to completing a new halal kitchen at MIA in October of last year, Flying Food Group added efficiencies and upgrades in production areas and additional storage. The hot kitchen was expanded to allow halal meal production and other specialty menus for the many international airlines that fly 2

out of MIA. The unit at MIA is one of Flying Food's "hybrid" kitchens combining airline catering with the company's Fresh Food Solutions retail catering arm. Fresh Food Solutions provides private label packaged foods and ready-to-eat meals in several markets.

The next big completion is expected to happen in late March or early April. That's when Flying Food is scheduled to go through full replacement of its catering unit in San Francisco. Like the others, SFO will have design efficiencies and an additional 20,000 square feet of production "that represents the best in design and workflow," according to a description of the new unit.