

# The trust factor

This is a special feature from *PAX International's* [October 2020 digital edition](#).



Flying Food Group opened a new unit in San Francisco in the spring of this year

In the fall of last year, [Flying Food Group](#) filled the left-hand column of its *FFG Update* newsletter with stories of new and continuing contracts with airline customers from three continents.

All of the airlines had years, and sometimes decades, of association with the Chicago-based caterer. [LOT Polish Airlines](#) topped the longtime loyalty list, as a Flying Food Group customer since 1990. Next up was [Singapore Airlines](#) that had purchased meal service from the company since 2003.

Other associations not mentioned in the news go back further. [SAS](#) had its first Flying Food Group meals more than 30 years ago, Alitalia 29 years ago and Korean Air 27 years ago.

Associations like that are something Nicolas Rondeau, Executive Vice President Airlines Sales and Marketing, says the company values greatly as the air travel industry slowly emerges from the worldwide outbreak of COVID-19. Load factors are still far below industry highs and scheduled service is lagging. Still, he tells *PAX International* that the company delivers a diverse selection of cuisines to airlines from Europe, Asia and the Middle East daily.



Nicolas Rondeau, Executive Vice President Airlines Sales and Marketing, Flying Food Group'

But to get back to robust schedules will take some time, and the scope of the challenge is revealed in figures from the [Bureau of Transportation Statistics](#) (BTS). In April of 2020, the number of international passengers had dropped to below 400,000 for the month; a figure that in the spring of a normal year is in the tens of millions. The number of international travelers had increased slightly to 770,000 by June, according to the most recent information available from the BTS at the time this was

written. International flights (normally a six-figure statistic in any month) had fallen to fewer than 9,000 in April and increased slightly to 11,387 by June, according to BTS.

Until traffic again returns, Flying Food Group and other caterers in the United States will adjust operations to fit guidelines of the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention. Protocols for screening staff and wearing of personal protective equipment has been in place since March. Other adjustments are taking place in day-to-day business. Rondeau says the company is keeping operational expenses and staffing in line with regular revenue streams.

Flying Food Group is fortunate that there has been a significant rebound in its Fresh Food Solutions business that supplies products to the consumer marketplace. As workers began trickling back to offices and work over the summer, increase in demand has followed.

“It is an area that is reopening much faster than the airline business,” Rondeau says.

Rondeau says he is getting requests from airlines for First and Business Class meals that are pre-plated in the kitchen, and bread that is pre-wrapped. For the company’s airline customers, meal presentations are now done in the digital realm. The new meal presentation format has been accepted by customers that have come to expect what the years of association with the caterer have shown them.

“Right now, the trust factor is very important,” Rondeau says.