

How Cotton Patch Cafe Improved Operations with Crunchtime Inventory and Learning

Cotton Patch Cafe is an American homestyle restaurant chain celebrated for its scratch-made Texan-style favorites. Founded in 1989, the brand has grown to 40+ full-service casual dining kitchens throughout Texas, Oklahoma, and New Mexico. To maintain its commitment to wholesome, Texan hospitality, Cotton Patch Cafe partnered with Crunchtime to digitize its back-of-house operations and streamline team development.



40+
Dining Locations



Casual
Dining



U.S.



Crunchtime Inventory
Crunchtime Learning



50%+ decrease
in 90-day and
6-month turnover

Doubled
food handler certifications
within two weeks

Significant increase
in trust from operators
to leadership

Challenge

Reducing Complexity for Operators

Cotton Patch Cafe's support center faced a critical challenge: providing sufficient assistance to its locations without disrupting daily operations.

"We had to balance supporting our operators by making space for them to run their restaurants with as little interference as possible," explained Ashley Helkenn, Cotton Patch's Senior Manager of Learning and Development. "Our goal was lots of support with little interference while also meeting the needs of the departments that enable them. For us, simplicity meant

not having to search emails for the most recent update to a policy or procedure and not having to hope that the recipe the team was working from was the most updated."

The team needed to move away from manual, paper-based processes that led to information silos and execution errors, particularly the administrative burden of manually monitoring program attendance and food handler certification deadlines.

Solution

A Unified Digital Solution

Cotton Patch Cafe implemented Crunchtime Inventory and Crunchtime Learning to migrate training and resources into a single, accessible hub.

Digital Recipe Management

The brand eliminated physical recipe books, moving all documentation to the Crunchtime Inventory Mobile App. This ensured that every kitchen, regardless of location, followed the same standards for prep and plate presentation.

Automated Training & Compliance

By using Crunchtime Learning, managers no longer had to manually monitor program attendance or certification deadlines because the system tracked it for them. The system manages food handler certifications, hourly position training, and certification trackers.

Centralized Resources

The resource gallery became the go-to destination for newsletters, website links, and operational resources, ensuring that the single source of truth was always accessible.



“We stopped printing recipes and moved them all online. This helped our back-of-house teams gain experience logging into Crunchtime, and just as important, there was no more wondering if teams were working off the correct recipe or following the most updated procedure.”



Ashley Helkenn
Senior Manager of Learning and Development
Cotton Patch Cafe

Results

Higher Retention and Faster Onboarding

By removing the administrative burden from store managers, Cotton Patch Cafe saw immediate, measurable improvements in employee engagement and operational speed.

- **Boosting Retention:** Following the rollout, 90-day and 6-month turnover decreased by more than 50%.
- **Accelerated Compliance:** Food handler certifications completed within two weeks of hire doubled.
- **Operational Trust:** Above-store leaders saw a significant increase in trust from operators, who saw that the support center was working to help them run their cafes while respecting their time.

“We couldn’t slow down the pace of updates and changes, but we could take the complexity out of properly executing those changes with Crunchtime,” noted Ashley.

Today, the culture at Cotton Patch Cafe has shifted. The phrase “let’s throw it on Crunchtime” is common at the support center, as every department sees the value of a centralized, organized solution. By integrating Crunchtime Inventory and Crunchtime Learning, Cotton Patch Cafe has empowered its managers to spend less time on paperwork and more time delivering the wholesome hospitality their guests expect.