Level

Restaurants Financial Benchmarks

2026 | Reviewed 2026-10-07

Source-aware references and practical operating worksheets.

levelcfo.com/benchmarks/restaurants/

How to use this report

This dataset separates source-specific published observations, retained source-attributed references with explicit verification limits, and Level planning inputs. Observation periods differ by metric. No measured Level restaurants cohort or common percentile distribution is supplied.

> Use the stated population, period and definition for each source reference. Separate Level planning inputs are illustrations, not a measured Level industry cohort or a common percentile distribution.

Choose the missing source or operating decision before optimizing a ratio. Compare like denominators and populations. Source-specific chart percentiles do not establish percentiles for the mixed reference tables.

Operating reference snapshot

Reference A, center and reference C retain the existing comparison positions. They are not common measured percentiles, ascending numerical bins or proven quality ranks. Each source observation and planning input retains its own definition and population.

Metric	Reference A	Center reference	Reference C
Prime Cost (Food + Labor)	> 70%	60-65%	< 55%
Pre-Tax Income Margin (FSR)	< 0%	~3%	> 8%
Pre-Tax Income Margin (LSR)	< 2%	~4%	> 10%
Gross Margin (after food + bev COGS)	< 62%	65-70%	> 72%
Cash Buffer Days (Historical Chase Definition)	< 10 days	~16 days	> 30 days
Food Cost % (LSR)	> 38%	32.4%	< 27%
Food Cost % (FSR)	> 38%	32.0%	< 27%

Prime Cost (Food + Labor): Retained planning or previously attributed reference; exact measurement unverified. No measured common population; planning references differ. Independent planning prime-cost bands. Use food and beverage cost plus fully loaded labor divided by the same net sales. Component medians cannot establish the median of their sum.

Pre-Tax Income Margin (FSR): Scoped published observation plus independent planning bands. More than 900 operators overall; segment count not captured. NRA 2025 publication reports 2024 full-service respondent median pre-tax income of 2.8% of sales, rounded to approximately 3% here. The lower and upper bands are separate Level planning inputs, not source percentiles. The overall Abstract covers more than 900 operators; the segment sample is not captured. Primary source and definition

Pre-Tax Income Margin (LSR): Scoped published observation plus independent planning bands. More than 900 operators overall; segment count not captured. NRA 2025 publication reports 2024 limited-service respondent median pre-tax income of 4.0% of sales. Lower and upper bands are separate planning inputs, not source percentiles; the segment sample is not captured. Primary source and definition

Gross Margin (after food + bev COGS): Retained planning or previously attributed reference; exact measurement unverified. No measured common population; planning references differ. Independent planning gross-margin bands after food and beverage cost, before labor. Use the same sales denominator; gross margin does not equal operating or net margin.

Cash Buffer Days (Historical Chase Definition): Scoped published observation plus independent planning bands. 597,000 small businesses overall; restaurant count not captured. Chase analyzed February-October 2015 transaction data for 597,000 eligible nonseasonal Chase account businesses in metropolitan areas overall, publishing in 2016. Restaurant median cash-buffer days were 16; the restaurant subgroup size is not captured. Cash-buffer days use average daily balance divided by average daily outflows. Other displayed values are planning sensitivities, not current percentiles. Primary source and definition

Food Cost % (LSR): Scoped published observation plus independent planning bands. More than 900 operators overall; segment count not captured. NRA 2025 commentary reports 2024 limited-service respondent median food and nonalcoholic beverage cost at 32.4% of sales. The 38/27% bounds are separate planning comparisons, not source percentiles; the subgroup sample is not captured. Primary source and definition

Food Cost % (FSR): Scoped published observation plus independent planning bands. More than 900 operators overall; segment count not captured. NRA 2025 commentary reports 2024 full-service respondent median food and nonalcoholic beverage cost at 32.0% of sales. The 38/27% bounds are separate planning comparisons, not source percentiles; the subgroup sample is not captured. Primary source and definition

Additional operating references

Metric	Reference A	Center reference	Reference C
Beverage Cost % (bev sales)	> 30%	20-24%	< 18%
Occupancy Cost % (FSR)	> 8%	5.7%	< 4%
Sales per Labor Hour (FSR)	< $50	$65-$90	> $100
Hourly Turnover (FSR)	> 130%	92%	< 70%
Off-Premise Mix (FSR)	< 20%	30%	> 45%
Marketing % of Sales	< 1%	3-6%	5-8%
5-Year Survival Rate	-	~51%	-

Beverage Cost % (bev sales): Retained planning or previously attributed reference; exact measurement unverified. No measured common population; planning references differ. Independent beverage-cost planning bands with beverage sales as denominator. Define alcoholic/nonalcoholic mix, waste and inventory cutoff before comparing.

Occupancy Cost % (FSR): Retained planning or previously attributed reference; exact measurement unverified. No measured common population; planning references differ. The center is a previously attributed full-service occupancy reference without a retained exact source capture. Lower/upper bands are planning inputs. Reconcile rent, CAM and facilities costs with consistent net sales.

Sales per Labor Hour (FSR): Retained planning or previously attributed reference; exact measurement unverified. No measured common population; planning references differ. Independent sales-per-labor-hour planning bands. Use actual productive and paid hours and the same sales period; concept mix and service requirements change comparability.

Hourly Turnover (FSR): Retained planning or previously attributed reference; exact measurement unverified. No measured common population; planning references differ. The center is a previously attributed historical workforce-turnover reference with exact source population unverified. Other bands are planning inputs; measure exits and eligible average headcount before comparison.

Off-Premise Mix (FSR): Retained planning or previously attributed reference; exact measurement unverified. No measured common population; planning references differ. The center is a previously attributed off-premise mix reference with exact vintage and respondent sample unverified. The outer bands are planning inputs; define eligible orders and sales consistently.

Marketing % of Sales: Retained planning or previously attributed reference; exact measurement unverified. No measured common population; planning references differ. Independent marketing-spend planning bands, not a measured return ranking. Test incremental contribution and cash timing before changing the budget.

5-Year Survival Rate: Retained planning or previously attributed reference; exact measurement unverified. No measured common population; planning references differ. The approximately 51% reference was previously attributed to BLS NAICS 72 establishment survival, which includes accommodation as well as food services. The precise cohort/vintage is not reverified here; it is neither restaurant-only nor a company-specific failure probability.

The CLEAR operating framework

C: Cash

Build a dated cash schedule for payroll, rent, suppliers and card settlements. Profit and liquidity answer different questions.

L: Labor

Track fully loaded labor, sales per paid hour, shift workload and turnover. Consider service quality and demand before changing staffing.

E: Earnings

Measure food and labor on the same net-sales denominator. Prime cost is one input alongside rent, royalties, overhead and financing.

A: Accounts

Separate traffic, menu prices, channel mix and order contribution. Higher reported sales do not establish more guests or profitable growth.

R: Risk

Review rent, lease dates, franchise obligations, catering concentration, weather and tourism exposure against actual cash and contribution.

CLEAR organizes operating questions; it does not establish measured causal effects or guaranteed results.

Labor Cost % of Sales: Published LSR 2024 Median and Retained References

NRA 2025 commentary reports 2024 respondent medians from an Abstract based on more than 900 operators. The retained profit/loss subgroup values remain separately attributed references; they are not staffing-cause estimates. Compare your sales, covers, paid hours and other costs before changing shifts.

Source: NRA August 2025 commentary verifies only the 31.7% LSR 2024 respondent median in this chart; remaining profit/loss values have unverified prior attribution. More than 900 operators overall in the 2025 Abstract, observations from 2024; exact segment and prior profit/loss edition samples not captured. Reference periods differ or are unverified; planning cases have no observation period. Source context and definition (verified values identified separately)

Source category / reference label	Value (%)	Evidence class
Previously attributed Limited-Service profit	30%	Previously attributed profit/loss group reference; edition, period and population unverified
Published LSR respondent median (2024)	31.7%	Published NRA 2024 respondent median
Previously attributed Limited-Service loss	34.1%	Previously attributed profit/loss group reference; edition, period and population unverified
Previously attributed Full-Service profit	34.2%	Previously attributed profit/loss group reference; edition, period and population unverified
Previously attributed Full-Service loss	42.9%	Previously attributed profit/loss group reference; edition, period and population unverified

Salaries, wages and benefits divided by same-period sales for the published NRA respondent median. Define other loaded labor costs separately in your own plan; unverified profit/loss references may use different report editions.

One published respondent median plus previously attributed, unverified subgroup inputs

Prime Cost (Food + Labor) % of Sales

The retained 64% and 68% chart values are Level planning cases. Separately, 32.4+31.7=64.1 and 32.0+36.5=68.5 are sums of published food and labor medians, not prime-cost medians. NRA separately publishes a 65% limited-service prime-cost median for its 2024 respondents. The 70/75/80% inputs are planning sensitivities, not distress predictions. Use one net-sales denominator and reconcile actual costs.

Source: Level planning cases; separate NRA 2025 Abstract commentary on 2024 respondent medians. Displayed inputs are Level planning cases, not source medians. Reference periods differ or are unverified; planning cases have no observation period. Source context and definition (verified values identified separately)

Source category / reference label	Value (%)	Evidence class
Planning cost case 64%	64%	Independent Level prime-cost planning input
Planning cost case 68%	68%	Independent Level prime-cost planning input
Planning cost case 70%	70%	Independent Level prime-cost planning input
Planning cost case 75%	75%	Independent Level prime-cost planning input
Planning cost case 80%	80%	Independent Level prime-cost planning input

Actual prime cost=(food and beverage cost+fully loaded labor cost)/same net-sales denominator. Separate component medians cannot be added to estimate the median of their sum.

Level planning cases; separate published median context

Food + Non-Alcoholic Beverage Cost % of Sales: Published 2024 Medians and Planning Inputs

NRA 2025 commentary gives 2024 food and non-alcohol beverage cost medians of 32.4% for limited-service and 32.0% for full-service respondents. The other 38/33/27% displayed values are retained planning inputs with no captured percentile proof. A lower ratio does not establish lower dollar spending or a particular causal operating improvement.

Source: NRA September 2025 food-cost commentary on 2024 respondents, published 32.4% LSR/32.0% FSR medians; separate Level planning inputs. NRA 2025 Abstract commentary on 2024 respondents; other displayed inputs are Level planning cases. Reference periods differ or are unverified; planning cases have no observation period. Source context and definition (verified values identified separately)

Source category / reference label	Value (%)	Evidence class
Planning food-cost input 38%	38%	Level planning input, not a source percentile
Planning food-cost input 33%	33%	Level planning input, not a source percentile
Published LSR median 2024	32.4%	Published NRA 2024 respondent segment median
Published FSR median 2024	32%	Published NRA 2024 respondent segment median
Planning food-cost input 27%	27%	Level planning input, not a source percentile

Food and nonalcoholic-beverage costs divided by matching sales for the published NRA respondent medians. Planning inputs are separate; do not substitute alcoholic-beverage sales or total operating expenses as denominator.

Published respondent medians plus independent Level planning inputs

Cash Buffer Days: Published 2015 Chase Medians and Planning Buffers

JPMorgan Chase Institute published 16 restaurant and 27 overall median cash-buffer days using 597,000 small businesses' February-October 2015 transactions in its 2016 report. These are historical average balance/average daily outflow ratios, not 2026 medians. The 30/60-day displayed values are Level planning cases. Build a dated forecast from your actual obligations and funding access rather than treating one ratio as a failure rule.

Source: JPMorgan Chase Institute, September 2016 Cash Flows, Balances, and Buffer Days, February-October 2015 observations. 597,000 eligible Chase account businesses overall in 367 metropolitan areas; restaurant subgroup count not captured. Observed transactions February-October 2015; planning cases have no observation period. Source context and definition (verified values identified separately)

Source category / reference label	Value (d)	Evidence class
Published restaurants (2015)	16d	Published Chase 2015 transaction-population median
Published all small businesses (2015)	27d	Published Chase 2015 transaction-population median
Planning buffer 30 days	30d	Level planning buffer input
Planning buffer 60 days	60d	Level planning buffer input

Average daily cash balance/average daily cash outflows for the source period. Planning targets are independent scenario inputs.

Published historical Chase transaction-population medians plus independent planning buffers

Occupancy Cost References (Historical Attribution Not Reverified)

The retained NRA-attributed occupancy references have segment and location limits, not one universal lease threshold. Verify base rent, CAM and other facility charges on the same net-sales period. A 7% or 8% sensitivity does not establish default risk; renewal dates, cash reserves and other costs matter.

Source: Previously attributed source context (exact values not reverified): National Restaurant Association, 2024 occupancy commentary. Retained context: NRA 2024 occupancy commentary. Exact report population/positions are not certified unless a bar is explicitly labeled published below. Reference periods differ or are unverified; planning cases have no observation period.

Source category / reference label	Value (%)	Evidence class
Rural LSR	3.2%	Retained reference input; report value or position unverified
Suburban LSR	5%	Retained reference input; report value or position unverified
LSR overall	5.2%	Retained reference input; report value or position unverified
FSR overall	5.7%	Retained reference input; report value or position unverified
Urban	6%	Retained reference input; report value or position unverified

Defined occupancy costs divided by matching sales. Specify rent, CAM, taxes, insurance and facilities inclusions; exact historical source scope is unverified for these references.

Retained source-attributed references; exact report values not independently reverified

Illustrative $100-Order Contribution by Channel (Assumed Item Margin and Fees)

This illustration assumes a $100 order and 68% item margin before labor and overhead. Pickup additionally assumes a 2 percentage-point cost, giving 66%; marketplace examples subtract 25/30 percentage-point fees, giving 43/38%. These are independent Level scenario assumptions, not guaranteed channel fees or margins. Verify contract tier, commission base, prices, packaging, payment costs and incremental labor.

Source: Level illustration using assumed item margin and fee sensitivities, not measured channel results. Independent Level order-contribution scenarios; actual fee bases and contract tiers require verification. Reference periods differ or are unverified; planning cases have no observation period.

Source category / reference label	Value (%)	Evidence class
Dine-in	68%	Level illustrative calculation with assumed fee and item-margin inputs
1st-party pickup	66%	Level illustrative calculation with assumed fee and item-margin inputs
3rd-party delivery (25% fee)	43%	Level illustrative calculation with assumed fee and item-margin inputs
3rd-party delivery (30% fee)	38%	Level illustrative calculation with assumed fee and item-margin inputs

Illustrative retained order contribution divided by assumed order revenue: assumed item margin less fee percentage points on the same $100 order base. Labor, overhead and other costs are outside this model.

Level illustrative order-contribution arithmetic, not measured channel results

Hourly Turnover References (Different Attributed Reporting Windows)

The retained Black Box-attributed turnover inputs use different periods and segments; exact values are not independently reverified here. In a separate illustration, 30 employees x 110% turnover x $2,700 assumed replacement cost equals $89,100, not a measured saving. Verify annualized definitions, actual replacements and cost before deciding a retention budget.

Source: Previously attributed source context (exact values not reverified): Black Box Intelligence, Workforce Trends Q3 2025. Retained context: Black Box Intelligence, Workforce Report 2025. Exact report population/positions are not certified unless a bar is explicitly labeled published below. Reference periods differ or are unverified; planning cases have no observation period.

Source category / reference label	Value (%)	Evidence class
FSR 2025 (Q1-Q3)	92%	Retained reference input; report value or position unverified
FSR 2024 (Q3)	96%	Retained reference input; report value or position unverified
LSR 2025 (Q3)	110%	Retained reference input; report value or position unverified
LSR 2024 (Q3)	135%	Retained reference input; report value or position unverified

Employee exits divided by eligible average headcount for the defined reporting period, annualized only with a stated method. Prior source references use different segments and periods and are not a common cohort.

Retained source-attributed references; exact report values not independently reverified

Restaurant concept scenarios

> Retained Level planning inputs, source population not established. Not a measured sample or percentile distribution. Blank owner-input forms contain no measured values. Independent planning ranges are not a complete reconciled model, causal forecast, tax quote, financing quote or valuation opinion.

Choose a comparable concept, service mix and period. These legacy concept ranges are retained planning inputs, not a measured sample of restaurants. Food, labor, occupancy and net figures are independent ranges, not a complete reconciled profit model. Replace them with your own net-sales and cost records. Concept and prime-cost worksheets use independent scenario assumptions. Their labor ranges and endpoints are not the same reconciled model; construct your own consistent totals.

Concepts

Type	Revenue	Food	Labor	Occupancy	Net
Fine Dining	$1.5M-$3M	28-35%	30-35%	8-12%	3-5%
Casual Dining	$1M-$2M	28-32%	28-33%	6-10%	3-6%
Fast Casual	$800K-$1.5M	28-32%	25-30%	6-10%	6-9%
QSR	$500K-$1.5M	25-30%	25-30%	6-8%	6-9%
Food Trucks	$250K-$500K	28-35%	20-28%	0-3%	6-9%
Ghost Kitchens	$300K-$800K	28-35%	15-25%	3-8%	15-20%

Record your actual source, period, denominator and assumptions beside each input before making a decision.

Prime-cost planning

> Retained Level planning inputs, source population not established. Not a measured sample or percentile distribution. Blank owner-input forms contain no measured values. Independent planning ranges are not a complete reconciled model, causal forecast, tax quote, financing quote or valuation opinion.

Compute prime cost as (food and beverage cost + fully loaded labor cost) / the same net-sales denominator. Do not add percentages calculated on different denominators. Independent range endpoints need not add to the prime-cost range; calculate a coherent scenario before using it. Track opening inventory + purchases - closing inventory and include labor taxes and benefits consistently. Concept and prime-cost worksheets use independent scenario assumptions. Their labor ranges and endpoints are not the same reconciled model; construct your own consistent totals.

Prime Costs

Concept	Prime	Food	Labor
Fine Dining	65-70%	30-35%	33-38%
Casual Dining	60-65%	28-32%	30-35%
Fast Casual	55-60%	28-32%	25-30%
QSR	50-55%	25-30%	22-28%
Bars / Beverage-Led	55-60%	18-24%	28-35%

Record your actual source, period, denominator and assumptions beside each input before making a decision.

Occupancy review

> Retained Level planning inputs, source population not established. Not a measured sample or percentile distribution. Blank owner-input forms contain no measured values. Independent planning ranges are not a complete reconciled model, causal forecast, tax quote, financing quote or valuation opinion.

Review base rent, CAM, property charges and related facility costs against the same net-sales period. Model renewal dates, sales seasonality and alternative layouts. A lower ratio alone does not prove a site is profitable. Verify actual lease terms before planning a change.

Your lease review inputs

Input	Your Record
Base rent and CAM	_____
Reporting-period net sales	_____
Renewal, escalation and break clauses	_____

Record your actual source, period, denominator and assumptions beside each input before making a decision.

Labor scheduling review

> Retained Level planning inputs, source population not established. Not a measured sample or percentile distribution. Blank owner-input forms contain no measured values. Independent planning ranges are not a complete reconciled model, causal forecast, tax quote, financing quote or valuation opinion.

Separate wage rate, paid hours, productive service hours and demand by shift. Review schedule changes against service quality, workload and legal requirements. A lower labor percentage does not establish that removing staff will improve profit. Pilot a bounded schedule change and measure the actual result.

Your shift review inputs

Input	Your Record
Paid hours and loaded labor cost	_____
Net sales, covers and service workload	_____
Actual service and contribution result	_____

Record your actual source, period, denominator and assumptions beside each input before making a decision.

Your operating scorecard

Metric	Your number	Source / period / denominator
Prime Cost (Food + Labor)	_____	_____
Pre-Tax Income Margin (FSR)	_____	_____
Pre-Tax Income Margin (LSR)	_____	_____
Gross Margin (after food + bev COGS)	_____	_____
Cash Buffer Days (Historical Chase Definition)	_____	_____
Food Cost % (LSR)	_____	_____
Food Cost % (FSR)	_____	_____
Beverage Cost % (bev sales)	_____	_____
Occupancy Cost % (FSR)	_____	_____
Sales per Labor Hour (FSR)	_____	_____
Hourly Turnover (FSR)	_____	_____
Off-Premise Mix (FSR)	_____	_____
Marketing % of Sales	_____	_____
5-Year Survival Rate	Population statistic, not your company input	_____

Reconcile missing source records first. Separate margin, cash timing and financing needs. Record a bounded action, owner, expected outcome and actual result.

Sources and next steps

National Restaurant Association, 2025 Restaurant Operations Data Abstract commentary on 2024 respondents (only values with an exact captured source are verified; other attribution is historical context)

Black Box Intelligence, monthly industry trends + workforce reports (only values with an exact captured source are verified; other attribution is historical context)

Technomic, Top 500 Chain Restaurant Report (only values with an exact captured source are verified; other attribution is historical context); background only, no displayed numeric value

BLS, QCEW + Business Employment Dynamics (only values with an exact captured source are verified; other attribution is historical context)

FRED, Census Service Annual Survey (NAICS 722) (only values with an exact captured source are verified; other attribution is historical context); background only, no displayed numeric value

Public chain 10-Ks (cash conversion, DPO, DSO) (only values with an exact captured source are verified; other attribution is historical context) (background only; no displayed value exactly verified here)

Level operating guidance; no measured Level restaurant cohort is supplied. Contractor research is a separate population.

National Restaurant Association August 20 2025 Restaurant Operations Data Abstract release, 2024 respondent pretax and prime-cost observations; not goals.

JPMorgan Chase Institute 2016 cash-buffer report using February-October 2015 eligible nonseasonal Chase account transactions.

Use the stated population, period and definition for each source reference. Separate Level planning inputs are illustrations, not a measured Level industry cohort or a common percentile distribution.

Canonical JSON references | Interactive benchmark page

Level pricing | Find your gap | Discuss your operating numbers

CFO Services for Restaurants

Restaurant Profit Margins Explained

Prime Cost: The Number That Runs Your Restaurant

Level | Reviewed 2026-10-07 | SHA256 of compact JSON serialization 0e30627a6ffba8ac3db54131e24410aff8e68c2e95bfb6501128571ad1a4db68
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