MULTI-CLIENT SPONSORSHIP STUDY

Winning Operator Acceptance

Proposed 2027 Research Program #12747

Introduction

Foodservice operators continue to look for growth, but uncertainty is making many organizations reluctant to approve new products, categories, equipment, or operating changes. Even strong ideas can stall when the perceived risk of acting exceeds the perceived risk of maintaining the status quo. The concern is not always product performance. Acceptance may break down with finance, procurement, supply chain, operations, distributor authorization, store-level execution, or a decision-maker who fears being held responsible for an unsuccessful change.

Foodservice IP's August 2026 executive roundtable reinforced this challenge. Participants described operators seeking strategic suppliers while simultaneously limiting experimentation, reducing SKUs, delaying projects, and demanding faster evidence of return. Simplot specifically noted that an idea may earn culinary and marketing support yet still be rejected by supply chain or operations. Manufacturers therefore need to understand not only what operators want, but how ideas move through the full route to market—and what proof, support, and internal alignment are required to convert interest into adoption.

This multi-client study will examine operator risk aversion, decision pathways, supplier differentiation, and the roles of distributors, DSRs, brokers, re-distributors, and manufacturer sales teams.

This proposal is a working research framework that will be refined with study sponsors before fieldwork begins.

Overall Objectives

- Measure current AI awareness, adoption, usage, and investment across commercial and noncommercial foodservice.
- Identify the AI applications producing the greatest operational and commercial value—and those that remain largely experimental.
- Understand barriers involving data, integration, cost, trust, security, governance, talent, and organizational readiness.
- Examine how AI is changing menu development, purchasing, supplier evaluation, forecasting, labor management, marketing, and customer engagement.
- Determine how manufacturers can use AI to improve innovation, sales effectiveness, customer support, and strategic decision-making.
- Provide sponsors with a practical framework for prioritizing AI opportunities and avoiding investments that lack a clear business case.

Proposed Key Issues

To be refined with sponsor input during kickoff.

Operator Climate, Risk and Investment

- How willing are operators to invest in new products, categories, equipment, technology, and service models under current economic uncertainty?

- Which forms of uncertainty—traffic, costs, labor, leadership turnover, consumer demand, policy, or capital availability—most strongly discourage action?
- Where are operators still prepared to spend, test, or expand, and what distinguishes those opportunities from projects being postponed or rejected?
- How does risk tolerance differ by segment, operator size, ownership structure, financial performance, and organizational sophistication?
- How much does personal career risk influence decisions, and what allows an internal champion to advocate safely for change?

Decision Pathways and Internal Barriers

- How does an idea move from awareness through evaluation, specification, authorization, testing, rollout, and repeat purchase?
- Which functions—culinary, marketing, operations, procurement, supply chain, finance, IT, or senior leadership—can advance or stop an initiative?
- Where do attractive concepts most commonly fail: business case, price, distribution, labor, equipment, training, consistency, availability, or store-level execution?
- What tensions exist among culinary appeal, consumer demand, operational feasibility, supply-chain requirements, and financial return?
- How do approval requirements and barriers differ between commercial and noncommercial operators?

Evidence, Trials and the Business Case

- What proof do operators require before considering a new product or program—consumer insight, sales potential, traffic, margin, labor savings, comparable-customer results, or operational validation?
- Which evidence sources are trusted, and how should manufacturers present research without overwhelming or overselling the customer?
- What trial, pilot, limited-time offer, phased rollout, or secondary-supplier structures reduce the perceived cost of being wrong?
- How quickly do operators expect financial or operational results, and which leading indicators are acceptable before a full return can be demonstrated?
- What support is required before, during, and after a test to prevent a promising idea from failing in execution?

Supplier Differentiation and Route-to-Market Execution

- What makes a manufacturer a genuinely strategic supplier rather than simply a product vendor?
- How can manufacturers differentiate through insight, category expertise, culinary support, operational problem-solving, training, responsiveness, and customer-specific ideas?
- What roles do distributor DSRs, brokers, re-distributors such as Dot Foods, and manufacturer salespeople play in awareness, availability, authorization, recommendation, and follow-through?
- Where do communication, incentives, product information, samples, distributor stocking, pricing, or accountability break down across the channel?
- What practical selling framework can help manufacturers diagnose barriers, align stakeholders, reduce risk, and create demand rather than merely present products?

Proposed Scope of Coverage

The study will examine acceptance from initial manufacturer outreach through operator approval, channel authorization, testing, rollout, and ongoing execution. Final respondent qualifications, segment quotas, and interview mix will be established with sponsors.

Operator Coverage

- Commercial restaurants, including chains, multi-unit organizations, and selected high-volume independents
- Noncommercial operators, including education, healthcare, senior living, business and industry, and recreation
- Foodservice management companies, where relevant
- Decision-makers in culinary, menu development, operations, procurement, supply chain, finance, marketing, category management, and executive leadership

Channel Coverage

- Broadline and specialty distributor sales representatives and relevant category or merchandising personnel
- Foodservice brokers and sales agencies
- Re-distributors, including Dot Foods and comparable organizations
- Manufacturer and supplier sales, customer marketing, culinary, insights, and channel leadership

Proposed Methodology

Final sample design and research instruments will be shaped with sponsor input.

1. Sponsor Kickoff, Ideas and Proprietary Input

- Private kickoff discussion with each sponsor to review objectives, product categories, customer priorities, internal hypotheses, recurring sales barriers, and intended uses of the research.
- Sponsor input into operator and channel priorities, examples of successful and unsuccessful adoption, and issues requiring deeper examination.
- Confidential sponsor-only questions incorporated into the survey or interview guides and reported privately.

2. Development of Questionnaires and Surveys

- Review of the roundtable findings, relevant FSIP research, industry evidence, operator decision processes, and route-to-market issues to establish a practical baseline.
- Development of a quantitative operator questionnaire and structured qualitative discussion guides for distributors, DSRs, brokers, re-distributors, and suppliers.
- Sponsor review and refinement of the research instruments before fieldwork begins.

3. Channel Research

- Quantitative operator research: a nationwide online survey of approximately 200 qualified commercial and noncommercial foodservice decision-makers with direct knowledge of menu, purchasing, operations, supply chain, innovation, or supplier decisions.
- Qualitative channel interviews: approximately 25 in-depth discussions with distributor DSRs and other distributor personnel, brokers, re-distributors such as Dot Foods, and manufacturer/supplier sales teams.
- Measurement and exploration of risk tolerance, approval pathways, internal objections, evidence requirements, trials, distribution barriers, channel influence, supplier differentiation, and successful conversion practices.
- Comparison of operator expectations with what channel and supplier participants believe they provide, identifying disconnects that prevent adoption or execution.

4. Strategic Analysis and Reporting

- Integration of operator and channel findings to identify where acceptance breaks down and which actions can improve conversion.
- Analysis by segment, operator size, functional role, risk profile, and other relevant respondent characteristics, culminating in a practical how-to-win framework for sponsor sales, marketing, culinary, innovation, insights, distribution, and channel strategy.

Study Deliverables

- Comprehensive PowerPoint report featuring detailed analysis, strategic implications, charts, and executive commentary.
- Assessment of operator investment willingness, risk tolerance, internal decision pathways, approval barriers, and evidence requirements.
- Route-to-market analysis covering distributors, DSRs, brokers, re-distributors, and manufacturer sales teams.
- Identification of the points where awareness, interest, authorization, trial, rollout, and repeat purchase most commonly break down.
- Practical recommendations for business-case development, customer-specific selling, pilot design, channel activation, sales enablement, and post-sale support.
- A manufacturer how-to-win framework for diagnosing customer barriers, reducing perceived risk, aligning stakeholders, and improving acceptance.
- Complete operator questionnaire, qualitative discussion guides, cross-tabulations, and supporting data appendix.
- Confidential reporting of each sponsor's proprietary questions.
- Sponsor discussion following internal review of the report.
- Ongoing access to FSIP for follow-up questions and interpretation at no additional cost.
- Optional post-study strategy workshop to translate findings into company-specific priorities and action plans.

The Strategic Value to Sponsors

This research will help sponsors understand why operator interest so often fails to become approval, distribution, trial, or scaled execution. It will separate product objections from organizational and channel barriers, identify the evidence and support different stakeholders require, and show where manufacturers can reduce the cost and perceived risk of change.

Sponsors will gain a clearer understanding of how decisions are made, which functions and channel partners shape the outcome, what makes a supplier strategically useful, and how sales teams can create demand around the operator's business problem rather than simply promote a product. The resulting framework will be designed for practical application across sales, customer marketing, culinary, innovation, insights, and channel strategy.

Foodservice IP's Experience

Foodservice IP's engagement team includes experienced foodservice strategists and researchers with backgrounds in growth strategy, operator research, distribution, supply chain, innovation, sales effectiveness, and go-to-market planning. FSIP has conducted multi-stakeholder studies involving operators, manufacturers, distributors, brokers, commissaries, management firms, GPOs, and other channel participants.

The project will be led by Tim Powell, Principal. Senior FSIP consultants will remain involved from study design through fieldwork, analysis, reporting, and sponsor discussions so the findings are interpreted as strategic evidence rather than delivered as a stand-alone collection of survey results.

Timing and Fees

The anticipated project duration is approximately 12–14 weeks from initiation. Kickoff is targeted for late fourth quarter 2026, with delivery planned for the first or second quarter of 2027, depending on sponsor timing and the final fieldwork scope. Pre-launch sponsors will participate in a steering process and help refine the study objectives and research priorities. The fee is $15,000 for one study, $26,500 for two studies or $35,000 for three studies when confirmed together. Private, in-person presentations are exclusive of travel expenses.

Billing Policy

- 50% upon project initiation
- Balance due upon delivery of the final report

Conclusion

In a low-growth, uncertain environment, doing nothing can feel safer than approving a new idea. Yet operators and manufacturers that consistently avoid investment risk being overtaken by competitors willing to create demand, improve execution, and capture share. The central challenge is therefore not simply developing better products; it is making change easier to understand, authorize, distribute, test, and execute.

Foodservice IP's shared-cost research model combines broad industry evidence with sponsor customization and ongoing strategic support. Sponsors help shape the work, receive confidential coverage of their priority questions, and retain access to the study team after delivery.

Participation Authorization

Our company confirms participation in the Foodservice IP multi-client study, Winning Operator Acceptance: How Manufacturers Can Reduce Risk and Break Through in a Cautious Market (Project 12750), in the amount of $15,000.

Billing will follow the terms described in this proposal: 50% upon project initiation and the balance upon delivery of the final report.

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Name

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Title

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Company

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Address

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Email

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Signature

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Date

To participate, please sign this page and return it to tpowell@foodserviceip.com. Questions may be directed to Tim Powell at 312-600-5151.