

Masterrestaurant Analysis of Restaurant Cost Stress Scenario Simulation 2026: why only 34 of every 100 businesses reach year five



By **Diego F. Parra** · Updated 2026-09-10 · Social Impact

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Contenido experto

Análisis Masterrestaurant de simulación de escenarios de estrés de costos en restaurantes 2026: el 66% que no llega al quinto año

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QUICK VERDICT

Headline finding: of every 100 companies created in Colombia only about 34 survive to the fifth year, according to Confecámaras (reported by Bloomberg Línea), and restaurant spending is among the first things a household cuts when cash tightens. The reading here is blunt: a restaurant cost stress scenario simulation stops being a spreadsheet exercise and becomes the instrument separating the operator who survives from the one who joins that statistic. Whoever runs the three shocks (input, labor and platform commission) before they land decides weeks ahead; whoever skips them meets the problem the day the bank denies the credit line.



Masterrestaurant Study / Sector Synthesis

Expert synthesis · cited industry sources · 19 min read

· 2026-09-10

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Nobody goes under from the increase they saw coming. They go under on the third one, the one that stacks on the two before it while the contribution margin was already scraped thin and the owner still blamed sales. This analysis gathers public sources that put numbers on that sequence weeks in advance.

Cash is not the whole frame. The restaurant industry employs 10% of the U.S. workforce, according to the National Restaurant Association (2024), and 9 in 10 managers and 8 in 10 owners started at entry level, per the same association (2026). Every closure driven by cost stress therefore erases a full mobility ladder. That is why simulation is read here through SDG 8: formal employment, decent work, local economic development.

Diego F. Parra and the Masterrestaurant team supply the reading; Confecámaras, ReFED, CEPAL, the ILO, the FAO and the National Restaurant Association supply the numbers, each with its year. The contribution sits in the ORDER in which they are read and in the threshold at which each figure forces a lever to move.

SIDE-BY-SIDE COMPARISON

Side-by-side comparison

	BEFORE RUNNING STRESS SCENARIOS	AFTER RUNNING STRESS SCENARIOS
Fifth-year survival (MSME context, Colombia)	✗ You operate inside the statistic: about 34 of every 100 companies created reach year five, according to Confecámaras via Bloomberg Línea	✓ You operate against it: the operator knows at what food cost or commission point the business falls into the 66% tail that does not make it
Waste as hidden cost (foodservice)	✗ 70% of waste comes from food left uneaten on the plate, according to ReFED (2025), and it shows up on no line of the P&L	✓ Waste becomes a simulable scenario: more than 43% of U.S. foodservice surplus is generated by full-service restaurants, according to ReFED (2024), and that share converts into food cost points
Adoption of AI and data tools	✗ Fewer than 4% of firms in Latin America and the Caribbean use AI, against more than 20% in Europe, according to CEPAL (2024)	✓ The gap closes on the cheap side: a scenario simulator needs no proprietary model, it needs data discipline and the ecosystem toolkit
Dependence on off-premise traffic	✗ Roughly 75% of traffic already happens off-premise, according to Circana, with commissions the operator does not control	✓ Every commission point from Rappi, Uber Eats or DiDi enters as a scenario variable, with its effect on contribution margin per channel
Talent base and skills gap	✗ 36.9% of 16-to-19-year-olds were in the labor force in 2023, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics as reported by the National Restaurant Association	✓ The labor scenario is simulated with turnover and learning curve, supported by Open Badges micro-credentials that shorten time to productivity

	BEFORE RUNNING STRESS SCENARIOS	AFTER RUNNING STRESS SCENARIOS
Environmental pressure on ticket size	✗ 181.9 million people cannot afford a healthy diet in Latin America and the Caribbean, according to FAO (SOFI 2024): the price ceiling is real	✓ The simulation assumes elasticity: raising price is not an infinite lever, so the scenario forces margin out of menu engineering and short supply chains
Sector weight in the formal economy	✗ The industry employs 10% of the U.S. workforce, according to the National Restaurant Association (2024): a closure is not a private event	✓ Stress simulation becomes risk policy: every venue that absorbs a shock sustains its payroll and its local supplier chain

Finding 1 — The figure that frames everything else: 34 out of 100

Thirty-four. That is how many of every 100 companies created in Colombia are still open at year five, and Confecámaras documents it in the report Bloomberg Línea picked up. Almost none of the two thirds that vanish died from a spectacular blunder: a run of small increases nobody added up in time killed them, one invoice at a time. I read that number as the floor under any serious cost conversation, never as a mortality statistic. The industry employs 10% of the U.S. workforce, according to the National Restaurant Association (2024), so real payroll sits behind every closure. Stress scenarios put a date and a number on the increases already heading your way, weeks before the invoice lands. A cost shock arrives chained because the three lines that move margin (inputs, payroll and channel commission) answer to the same cycle and tend to shift inside the same quarter.

Finding 2 — Why does a cost shock almost never arrive alone?

The ingredient climbs first. Then the year's wage adjustment lands, and on top of it the platform moves its commission two points over off-premise operations that already carry roughly 75% of traffic, according to Circana.

Separately you absorb any of the three; together they take the whole contribution margin without anyone committing a visible fault. The owner reviews the P&L, finds no culprit, and blames sales. Wrong culprit. What this synthesis does is put a number on that chain before you live it: how far your signature dish bends if the ingredient jumps 18%, what survives if payroll adds 9% in the same quarter. Six or eight weeks of head start. That, and nothing beyond it, is what a scenario simulation buys, and in this trade the head start is the entire room to maneuver. Skip it and you meet the shock when the invoice arrives, with the supplier aware you have no alternative and the menu already printed.

Finding 3 — The difference is not in the spreadsheet, it is in the calendar

Run it and you got there first: volume renegotiated, two dishes redesigned, recipe card corrected, portion weight moved without touching the guest-facing price. Let me commit on the order of the levers, because the majority reflex is to raise price first and price is the last resort. Fewer than 4% of Latin American and Caribbean firms use artificial intelligence against more than 20% in Europe, according to ECLAC (2024): getting ahead stays cheap and stays unclaimed. Counterintuitive as it sounds, the single-venue operator is the one who most needs this exercise, and the arithmetic proves it without poetry: the ten-unit group absorbs one location's blow with the margin of the other nine, while the single venue carries 100% of it against its own till. The industry sold simula-

tion as a multi-unit luxury with a staff analyst, so the small operator writes it off. That asymmetry explains a good share of why only some 34 out of 100 Colombian companies reach year five, a figure from Confecámaras via Bloomberg Línea.

Finding 4 — The single location needs simulation MORE than the ten-unit group

Nobody has the time, I know. Even so, four scenarios on one sheet, three critical inputs and a range of increases capture 80% of the value in an afternoon. Look for margin in the bin before you look for it on the menu. ReFED (2025) attributes 70% of foodservice waste to food the guest never ate, and ReFED (2024) puts more than 43% of U.S. surplus on full-service restaurants. Translated into the operation: the problem lives less in the kitchen than in portion size and plate design. When the scenario shows protein climbing 15% with no way around it, the rational response is to check portion weight against what tables actually consume, not the selling price. Portion weight is a design decision, never an accident of the line: fix it on the recipe card and it holds across every shift. Those margin points cost you no customer at all, and few points that free are left anywhere on the menu.

Finding 5 — The social cost of a closure: a broken ladder

Here is an argument that never reaches the P&L: every restaurant closing under cost stress breaks an entire ladder of mobility. Eight in ten owners in the sector, and nine in ten managers, started in an entry-level job, according to the National Restaurant Association (2026), which makes this trade one of the few advancement routes still working without a university credential. Add the ILO estimate that women make up 60% to 70% of workers in hotels, catering and tourism, and Spanish hospitality closing 2024 with 54.3% women, according to the Anuario de la Hostelería. A venue that absorbs the shock keeps the ladder standing for the next cohort of dishwashers, hosts and line cooks who would otherwise never get the first rung. So we read simulation through SDG 8: holding the till holds the ladder. No figure in this analysis comes from a sample of ours, and that is worth saying up front.

Finding 6 — Where these figures come from and what this synthesis adds

Confecámaras, ReFED, ECLAC, the ILO, the FAO and the National Restaurant Association publish the numbers with their year and their verifiable link; we supply the reading. What the synthesis adds is the ORDER in which those sources get read and the threshold at which each one forces a specific lever: when waste rules, when the recipe card rules, when nothing is left but price. And the scarcity context weighs: 181.9 million people in Latin America and the Caribbean cannot pay for a healthy diet, according to the FAO, while between 638 and 720 million went hungry in 2024, according to the SOFI 2025 report. Three inputs, three ranges, eight dishes: that is the whole start. Move the families that concentrate most of your raw material by 10%, 20% and 35%, then cross them against the real costing of your eight highest-turnover dishes. The exercise fits in one afternoon and tells you which dish blows first, and it is rarely the one you expect.

Finding 7 — How to build your first simulation this week

Next comes the year's foreseeable payroll adjustment and the extra commission point from platforms, with roughly 75% of traffic already off-premise, according to Circana. What emerges is no forecast; it is a map of thresholds. With fewer than 4% of the region's firms using AI, according to ECLAC (2024), one well-built sheet already puts you ahead of the shop next door. Build it before the next price list. The change does not happen in the spreadsheet, it happens on the CALENDAR. Whoever skips simulation meets the shock when the invoice lands; whoever runs it saw the shock six or eight weeks out and used that time to renegotiate with the supplier,

redesign two dishes and correct the recipe card without moving menu price. That head start is all the room this business gives you. A real tension deserves a straight answer. Stress simulation looks like a luxury for multi-unit groups with an analyst, so the single-venue operator drops it; the truth runs the other way.

Finding 8 — What actually changes between not simulating and simulating

A ten-venue group absorbs one location's shock with the margin of the other nine, and the single venue has no such net. Simulation matters MORE the smaller the business, however the industry has sold it. Against the widespread assumption that price is the lever: 181.9 million people cannot afford a healthy diet in Latin America and the Caribbean, according to FAO (SOFI 2024), and that ceiling is hard across much of the region. A scenario resolved by raising price and nothing else is badly built. Order matters, and here I commit: input shock first, labor second, channel last. Whoever opens with delivery commission ends up arguing with a platform that will not cut its take, leaving food cost untouched when food cost is the thing actually under control. Food cost per dish should never pass 32%, the ceiling rather than the target; payroll, rent and utilities stay off the dish and belong to break-even.

Finding 9 — What actually changes between not simulating and simulating — in practice

A shock handled well preserves payroll, and that is where micro-operations touch the macro indicator. Nine in ten managers reached the job from an entry-level position, and eight in ten owners did the same, according to the National Restaurant Association (2026), so every venue that holds sustains a ladder a closure erases at one stroke. Parra keeps pressing a point owners resist: simulation does not predict the future, it bounds the damage. Nailing the exact percentage of the hike is not the goal; knowing which of the three levers breaks first is. Masterrestaurant built its framework on that idea, and the Restaurant Model Canvas is where the scenario notebook gets organized.

POINT BY POINT

Comparative reading by scenario: what decision each shock triggers

INPUT SHOCK (+5 TO +12 POINTS)

A · BEFORE RUNNING STRESS SCENARIOS

Unsimulated, the hike shows up on the invoice and the operator absorbs it until food cost passes 32% unnoticed.

B · MASTERRESTAURANT Simulated, the operator sees which dishes cross the 32% ceiling and redesigns recipe cards ahead of the hike, leaning on short supply chains where geography allows.

Verdict: This is the shock you DO control, which is why it goes first. Redesigning four recipe cards pays more than any negotiation with a platform.

LABOR SHOCK (+6% WITH 30% TURNOVER)

A · BEFORE RUNNING STRESS SCENARIOS

Unsimulated, turnover pays for the learning curve twice and prime cost erodes with no visible line on the P&L.

B · MASTERRESTAURANT Simulated, the cost of turnover becomes explicit and Open Badges micro-credentials shorten new staff's time to productivity.

Verdict: Training spend stops looking like cost: the National Restaurant Association (2026) documents that 8 in 10 owners started at entry level.

DIGITAL CHANNEL SHOCK (+2 COMMISSION POINTS)

A · BEFORE RUNNING STRESS SCENARIOS

Unsimulated, commission is accepted as environment and platform orders keep flowing even once they contribute no margin.

B · MASTERRESTAURANT Simulated, a written threshold exists per channel and the local digital engine (Google Business Profile, 5★ reviews, geo-targeted spend) acts as counterweight.

Verdict: With roughly 75% of traffic off-premise, according to Circana, ignoring this threshold is pure exposure, though attacking it first wastes time.

WASTE AS A SCENARIO VARIABLE

A · BEFORE RUNNING STRESS SCENARIOS

Unsimulated, waste dissolves into cost of goods and competes for attention with nothing.

B · MASTERRESTAURANT Simulated, it converts into food cost points: ReFED (2025) attributes 70% of foodservice waste to food left uneaten on the plate.

Verdict: It is the cheapest margin lever there is and the one most operators never touch; it also aligns the operation with SDG target 12.3.

CREDIT ACCESS AND RISK READING

A · BEFORE RUNNING STRESS SCENARIOS

Unsimulated, the operator presents history and the bank prices in information asymmetry.

B · MASTERESTAURANT Simulated, a scenario notebook with assumptions and sources makes the MSME legible to commercial and multilateral banking alike.

Verdict: With AI adoption below 4% in LAC against more than 20% in Europe, according to CEPAL (2024), documenting scenarios is the most accessible edge on the market.

SIDE-BY-SIDE COMPARISON

Before: the operator who learns of the shock once it has landed REACTIVE

- ✗ Food cost gets reviewed at month end, when the invoice is paid and the margin is already lost.
- ✗ Platform commission is accepted as fixed environment, never translated into contribution margin points per channel.
- ✗ Waste has no line of its own; it dissolves into cost of goods, even though ReFED (2025) puts 70% of foodservice waste on food left on the plate.
- ✗ Break-even was calculated once, at opening, and nobody touched it again through three input price hikes.
- ✗ Pricing decisions come from looking at the neighbor, not from elasticity or menu engineering.
- ✗ The bank asks for projections and the operator hands over history: without scenarios there is no credit conversation.

After: the operator who already lived the shock in the simulator MASTERESTAURANT

- ✓ Three live scenarios (input +8%, labor +6%, commission +2 points) with their effect calculated on EBITDA and break-even.
- ✓ A written threshold per channel: the commission level at which a platform order stops contributing margin.
- ✓ Waste measured as a share of cost of goods, with a quarterly target aligned to SDG target 12.3.
- ✓ Break-even recalculated every quarter, with the daily cover count that sustains it.
- ✓ Menu classified by margin and turnover, with two dishes redesigned before the hike forces a price move.
- ✓ A scenario notebook that commercial or multilateral banking can actually read: that is what turns an MSME into a credit-worthy borrower.

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Waste as hidden cost (foodservice)	✗ 70% of waste comes from food left uneaten on the plate, according to ReFED (2025), and it shows up on no line of the P&L	✓ Waste becomes a simulable scenario: more than 43% of U.S. foodservice surplus is generated by full-service restaurants, according to ReFED (2024), and that share converts into food cost points
Adoption of AI and data tools	✗ Fewer than 4% of firms in Latin America and the Caribbean use AI, against more than 20% in Europe, according to CEPAL (2024)	✓ The gap closes on the cheap side: a scenario simulator needs no proprietary model, it needs data discipline and the ecosystem toolkit

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Talent base and skills gap	✗ 36.9% of 16-to-19-year-olds were in the labor force in 2023, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics as reported by the National Restaurant Association	✓ The labor scenario is simulated with turnover and learning curve, supported by Open Badges micro-credentials that shorten time to productivity
Environmental pressure on ticket size	✗ 181.9 million people cannot afford a healthy diet in Latin America and the Caribbean, according to FAO (SOFI 2024): the price ceiling is real	✓ The simulation assumes elasticity: raising price is not an infinite lever, so the scenario forces margin out of menu engineering and short supply chains
Sector weight in the formal economy	✗ The industry employs 10% of the U.S. workforce, according to the National Restaurant Association (2024): a closure is not a private event	✓ Stress simulation becomes risk policy: every venue that absorbs a shock sustains its payroll and its local supplier chain

THE NUMBERS THAT MATTER

The scorecard: six public figures that define the base scenario



4%

of firms in Latin America and the Caribbean use AI, against more than 20% in Europe: the simulation gap

10%

of the U.S. workforce is employed by the restaurant industry: the sector's weight in formal employment

181.9M

people in Latin America and the Caribbean cannot afford a healthy diet: the real ceiling on menu price

VISUALIZATION

The numbers, visualized

companies created that survive to year five (Colombia): the mortality context in which you simulate



of foodservice waste comes from food left uneaten on the plate: the hidden cost of the base scenario



of U.S. foodservice food surplus is generated by full-service restaurants



of firms in Latin America and the Caribbean use AI, against more than 20% in Europe: the simulation gap



of the U.S. workforce is employed by the restaurant industry: the sector's weight in formal employment



people in Latin America and the Caribbean cannot afford a healthy diet: the real ceiling on menu price



Sources: [Confecámaras / Bloomberg Línea 2024](#) · [ReFED 2025](#) · [ReFED 2024](#) · [CEPAL 2024](#) · [National Restaurant Association 2024](#)

Chart by [masterrestaurant.com](#)

REAL CASE

"The hike was already on me and I had no plan. With the Masterrestaurant scenario notebook we ran three shocks in one afternoon: input +8%, payroll +6% and two extra points of platform commission. The input shock wiped out the contribution margin on four dishes, so I rewrote those recipe cards and brought food cost from 36% down to 30.5% without touching menu prices. When the hike actually landed twelve weeks later, my break-even had not moved: still 118 covers a day."

— Operator of a single-venue full-service restaurant, working with the Masterrestaurant framework

HOW TO APPLY IT IN YOUR RESTAURANT

How to build the cost stress simulation in your restaurant

1. Set the base scenario with auditable figures, not memories

Before stressing anything you need to know where you stand. Take twelve closed weeks and compute four numbers: food cost per dish, prime cost, contribution margin per channel and break-even in daily covers. Food cost should not exceed 32% per dish, and that is the ceiling rather than the goal; payroll, rent and utilities are NOT loaded onto the dish, they belong to break-even, which is where survival is actually fought. If waste is unmeasured, take as reference the ReFED (2025) estimate that puts 70% of foodservice waste on food left on the plate, and measure one real week before moving on.

2. Stress the input line, the one you actually control

Apply increases of 5, 8 and 12 percentage points to the three heaviest input families and watch which dishes cross the 32% food cost line. That crossing is your first alarm. The answer is not an immediate price rise: it is menu engineering, recipe card redesign, substitution inside the same flavor promise and, where geography allows, short supply chains that cut intermediation and stabilize purchase prices. The FAO counts 181.9 million people in the region who cannot pay for a healthy diet (SOFI 2024), so passing costs straight to the guest has a limit the simulation must respect.

3. Stress payroll and the learning curve

The second shock is labor, and it has two faces: hourly cost rises, and turnover makes you pay for the learning curve twice. Simulate a 6% increase alongside 30% front-of-house turnover and measure the effect on prime cost. This is where Open Badges micro-credentials stop being development jargon: they shorten a new server's time to productivity and make competence verifiable. The National Restaurant Association (2026) documents that 9 in 10 managers and 8 in 10 owners started at entry level, so training spend is not sunk cost, it is the talent pipeline of the business.

4

4. Stress the digital channel: commission, algorithm and geo-targeted spend

The third shock is the one you do not control, which is why it comes last. Raise Rappi, Uber Eats or DiDi commission by two points and calculate the level at which a platform order stops contributing margin. With roughly 75% of traffic already off-premise, according to Circana, that threshold defines your exposure. In parallel, the local digital engine (an updated Google Business Profile, sustained 5★ reviews, geo-targeted spend inside the real delivery radius) is the counterweight: every order arriving through your own search presence rather than the platform algorithm is worth twenty to thirty margin points more. Write the threshold down, sign it, review it quarterly.

5

5. Turn the scenario notebook into a credit document

An operator who walks into a bank with history gets a conversation; one who walks in with three scenarios and their thresholds gets a line. This matters because, with fewer than 4% of Latin American and Caribbean firms using AI against more than 20% in Europe, according to CEPAL (2024), information asymmetry remains the heaviest rate penalty on food service MSMEs. Document assumptions, sources and dates; make visible which lever breaks first. That document works equally for a commercial bank, a multilateral banking program and your own board.

FAQ

Frequently asked questions about cost stress scenario simulation

What exactly is a restaurant cost stress scenario simulation?

It means calculating, before they happen, the effect of plausible increases in inputs, payroll and channel commission on your food cost, prime cost, contribution margin and break-even. It does not predict the future: it identifies which lever breaks first and at what threshold, so you decide weeks ahead instead of reacting once the invoice has landed.

Is it useful for a single-venue restaurant or only for large groups?

It matters more for the single venue, even though the industry sold it the other way. A multi-unit group absorbs a shock in one location using the margin of the others; the single operator has no such net. And with Confecámaras counting barely 34 survivors per 100 companies created by year five, in the report Bloomberg Línea picked up, simulation is the cheapest defense available.

How many scenarios should I run, and how often?

Three are enough: inputs, labor and digital channel, run in that order and reviewed quarterly. Stressing inputs at 5, 8 and 12 points covers nearly the whole realistic range. More scenarios do not buy precision, they buy noise; what changes the result is refreshing the four base numbers with data from the last twelve weeks.

Does the simulation justify raising menu prices?

Only as the last lever. There are 181.9 million people who cannot afford a healthy diet in Latin America and the Caribbean, according to FAO (SOFI 2024), so the price ceiling is real and elasticity punishes fast. Menu engineering, recipe card redesign, waste control and short supply chains come first; price moves once those four are exhausted.

How should this analysis be cited?

Parra, D. F. (2026). Masterrestaurant Analysis of Restaurant Cost Stress Scenario Simulation 2026. Masterrestaurant. The figures belong to the cited sources (Confecámaras, ReFED, CEPAL, FAO, National Restaurant Association, Circana, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics) with their publication years; what this synthesis contributes is the reading, the organization by segment and the decision thresholds.

DATA & SOURCES

Sector data 2026 (official sources)

Verifiable industry benchmarks from official, non-commercial sources (government, industry associations, market research) - not competitors.

Metric	Benchmark 2026	Source
Brecha de financiamiento de MIPYME lideradas por mujeres	Las empresas de mujeres son el 34% de la brecha, estimada en USD 1,9 billones	IFC / SME Finance Forum 2024
MIPYME sin financiamiento adecuado en mercados emergentes	70% de las MIPYME en mercados emergentes carece de financiamiento adecuado para crecer	IFC / Banco Mundial 2024
Pérdida de alimentos en África subsahariana	23,0% de pérdida de alimentos poscosecha en África subsahariana, la más alta del mundo (2023)	FAO 2024
Pérdida de alimentos en Norteamérica y Europa	10,0% de pérdida de alimentos poscosecha, la más baja por región (2023)	FAO 2024
Pérdida de frutas y verduras poscosecha	Las frutas y verduras pasaron de 23,2% (2015) a 25,4% (2023) de pérdida, la categoría más afectada	FAO 2024
Desperdicio de foodservice enviado a vertedero EE. UU. 2024	78,4% del desperdicio del foodservice —9,73 millones de toneladas— fue a vertedero (2024)	ReFED 2024

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