

When the pandemic hit America's restaurants, it was as if an anvil dropped — on a bubble.

To run a restaurant, any kind of restaurant, is a constant struggle to keep that bubble aloft. Every day is a negotiation: of labor costs, food costs, rent, insurance, health inspections, and the art and craft of creating an experience special enough to keep people coming through the doors. When the pandemic lockdown forced hundreds of thousands of establishments to close, there was no backup plan. No one was prepared for the extent of the fallout.

The restaurant and fast food industry, the second-largest private employer in the United States, collapsed overnight. At least 5.5 million jobs evaporated by the end of April, and the number of people employed in food services is still 2.5 million fewer than in February...

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