

Food Service (Individual Portions), Sampling and Cooking Demonstrations

The following is only a guideline for selected regulatory requirements. You must be in compliance with all applicable regulations. Contact your local health department for specific requirements and guidance in conforming to the applicable regulations of the Connecticut Public Health Code, Section 19-13-B42.

Farmers Providing Foodservice and Individual Portions at the Market

Cooking, providing samples, or preparing food items at a farmers' market by any individual, even those not considered to be farmers, will be classified and regulated as a temporary food service establishment. Farmers who wish to cook or prepare food such as sandwiches, grilled meat, cider or other types of fresh juices, etc. at a farmers' market or who will be providing individual portions of food prepared on-site or that were previously prepared at an off-site location different than the market location, must contact their local health department for guidance regarding permit applications, food safety rules and regulations, and inspections. Cooking or preparing food at a farmers' market will generally require some form of local health department permit and inspection. Particular food safety concerns include employee hygiene (including hand washing), protecting food products from human (sneezing, coughing, etc.) and environmental (dust, insects, etc.) contamination, cooking potentially hazardous foods at temperatures high enough to destroy harmful pathogens, maintaining safe hot and cold holding temperatures, and keeping utensils clean and free of contamination. This type of food service is subject to Section 19-13-B42 of the Public Health Code.

If you plan to cook or prepare individual portion food items at your market or within your booth, you must contact the local health department that has jurisdiction over foodservice establishments in the town where the farmers' market is located.

Be advised that your local health department reserves the right to restrict items prepared at a temporary food service setting based upon degree of food safety risk. The local director of health may augment such requirements when needed to assure the service of safe food, may prohibit the sale of potentially hazardous food or drink consisting in whole or in part of milk or milk products, eggs, meat, poultry, fish, shellfish, or other ingredients capable of supporting the rapid and progressive growth of infectious or toxigenic microorganisms, or may modify specific requirements for physical facilities when in his/her opinion no health hazard will result.

Food Vendors (other than farmers)

The selling, cooking, providing samples, or preparing food items at the farmers' market by anyone will be classified and regulated as a "temporary foodservice establishment" and must operate in accordance with the CT PHC 19-13-B42 and all local ordinances including but not limited to application, permit and licensing, fees, and inspection. These types of vendors include, but are not limited to value-added vendors, bakeries, restaurants, hot dog vendors, itinerant vendors, ice cream vendors, etc.

A "temporary food service establishment" is defined as a food service establishment that operates at a fixed location for a temporary period of time, in connection with a carnival, circus, public exhibition, festival, celebration, or similar transitory gathering. Vendors seeking to obtain a "temporary food service establishment" permit will need to contact the local health department in the particular town or district in which they intend to operate. Permit fees for temporary food service establishments are determined by each individual local health department.

Any food service vendor at the market who is preparing foods, providing samples, or conducting a cooking demonstration needs to contact the appropriate local health department prior to setting up at the market.

Farmers Providing Food Samples

Providing food samples at farmers' markets allows consumers to try a product before purchasing it. This is especially important when the farmer is offering a new or different product that the customer has never tried before. Unsafe sampling methods can contaminate food and result in foodborne illness. Good marketing practices require that basic sanitation practices be followed when samples are offered at farmers' markets. Following the basic food safety practices mentioned in Chapter 11 can reduce your risk. The farmer offering samples should look carefully at every step of their sampling process to make the samples as safe as possible. The regulations of the Connecticut Public Health Code 19-13-B42 apply to all food samples offered at the farmers' market, including cut produce, fresh squeezed juices of all types, grilled meats, dips, spreads, etc.

Sample delivery

It is a good practice to use disposable single-use utensils for distribution of samples to customers. These include toothpicks, cups, etc. or you can use tongs if you control them. Customers should never reach into a plate or bowl containing exposed samples. You should have a wastebasket lined with a plastic bag available for customers to dispose of their sample waste. Follow the handwashing protocols discussed in the chapter titled "Food Safety Guidelines and Regulations" to prevent contamination of the food. Use toothpicks, wax paper, paper sampling cups or another appropriate means to distribute samples. In this way each farmer and his workers can prevent the hands of customers from touching and contaminating the food. Each farmer's dispensing method must prevent contamination by the customer, additional workers, and the farmer.

If you plan to offer samples at your market or within your booth, you must contact the local health department that has jurisdiction over foodservice establishments in the town where the farmers' market is located.

Cooking Demonstrations

One of the most successful events at farmers' markets is hiring a chef to come to the market to cook seasonal produce, meats and other products, and offer samples to the customers of the market. In order to promote uniformity and farmers' market food safety across the state, all farmers' markets that intend to conduct cooking demonstrations are required to operate in accordance with section 19-13-B42 of the Connecticut Public Health Code as well as the guidelines and procedures discussed in the following sections.

1. Samples must have been prepared from approved source foods only.
2. In all instances the person cooking, whether they are a farmer, hired chef, or other individual, shall comply with section 19-13-B42 of the Connecticut Public Health Code for temporary food-service establishments and requirements for sampling at the market.

Summary of cooking demonstration requirements

- If the cooking and prep areas of the demonstration are not under cover, some sort of overhead protection needs to be provided. A tent, canopy, or umbrellas are examples of overhead protection. The product needs to be protected at all times.
- Food products shall not be exposed to insects or other environmental contaminants such as dust, as well as any unnecessary handling as seen with bare hand contact of food. If electricity is available, a fan may be used to keep a gentle breeze going to keep insects off the product. (The chef may appreciate the fan as well.) Covering product in some manner at all times will also deter insects
- During the event, the person cooking will need a way to wash his/her hands. A simple, health department-approved set up could consist of an elevated container of potable water that is equipped with a turn-spout dispenser or drain, with a catch bucket placed below the container. Liquid soap and disposable towels must also be provided at the hand wash station. The section on "Food Safety Guidelines and Regulations" discusses hand wash stations and includes a picture of the simple setup.
- Facilities to wash and sanitize all utensils used throughout the day may be required, depending on the type of cooking demonstration and the food items involved. A three-compartment sanitizing wash station can be easily constructed with three tubs, potable water, soap, and an approved sanitizer. A temporary event 3-bay setup is pictured in the "Food Safety Guidelines and Regulations" section. You will find that this set up is convenient for cleaning up after the event. You will need more water than you think so bring an adequate supply. Remember, utensils must also be protected from insects, dust and other forms of contamination. An extra measure of protection for clean utensils, food, and food-related items can be accomplished by storing the items in a plastic container with a tight-fitting lid.
- All potentially hazardous foods must be maintained at safe hot and cold temperatures throughout the entire event. Hot potentially hazardous foods must be maintained at an internal temperature of 140°F or greater. Cold potentially hazardous foods must be maintained at 45°F or less. Coolers and plenty of ice packs must be available. Coolers cannot be made of Styrofoam, as these coolers

are impossible to sanitize. At no time should any product sit in water. You will need to have provisions for melted ice to drain away from the product.

Serving the cooking demonstration samples to your customers

The samples need to be adequately protected from all forms of contamination. The easiest way to accomplish this is to serve each sample individually. Examples are to serve each sample in an individual cup or plate or served with individual toothpicks. (You should provide plenty of waste containers to dispose of these items.) This will help to avoid customers touching any sample that is not theirs. This works best if you have a helper that controls the samples and will reduce the chance of any cross contamination. Helpers should be careful to avoid touching the product and avoid contamination of any utensils used to portion out the samples.

Farmers who plan to conduct cooking demonstrations of products being sold within their booth, must contact the local health department that has jurisdiction over foodservice establishments in the town where the farmers' market is located.

Licensing

Food Service License/ Permit for Farmers

Farmers, who are participating in local farmers' markets as vendors, and are selling **ONLY** fresh, raw, unprocessed produce are typically not regulated by the local health departments.

Fresh produce includes fruits and/or vegetables that have not been processed in any way. This means that the products have not been washed, cut, peeled, dried, pickled, packaged, cut, or modified from their natural state in any way. Rinsing of fresh fruits and vegetables for marketing purposes is a common practice. This is acceptable if clean water is used to rinse the produce and it is clear that the rinsed produce is not pre-washed and intended to be ready-to-eat. It is highly recommended that consumers be advised to wash all produce prior to consumption.

Farmers intending to sell or offer food beyond fresh, raw produce must contact the local health department in the particular town or district in which they intend to operate. Licenses for processed/manufactured products must be obtained from the state agency having jurisdiction over the specific food item being processed, unless the food item is a jam, jelly, preserve, or maple syrup exempt by state statute and properly labeled.

Licenses/Permits for Processed Products

Although the sale and marketing of whole, fresh, uncut fruits and vegetables generally does not require a permit to operate, the sale of processed food products in Connecticut typically requires some permit (or permits) to operate. When does a product become "processed?" Generally speaking, whenever you take a knife to a raw agricultural product, change its temperature and/or combine ingredients, or dry, portion, or pickle the product, it is a "processed" product. Packaged food products are also typically considered processed products.

You will need to check with both your market and appropriate state/local health departments before you plan to process and sell any of your products. Processors should be aware that processing a product, even minimally, increases the risk of contamination.

For these reasons, it is important that you make every effort to communicate your plans to state and local health department officials well in advance of actual manufacture and promotion of the food product.

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