Safe Food Sampling Tips for Farmers’ Markets Vendors

The 2014 Safe Food Sampling law (Minnesota Statute 28A.151) allows vendors and food demonstrators to prepare and offer food samples at Farmers’ Markets (3 or more persons who assemble at a defined location that is open to the public for the purpose of selling directly to the consumer the products of a farm or garden occupied and cultivated by the person selling the product.)

You do not need a food license for product sampling but you must follow the Minnesota food code requirements for “Special Event Food Stand” (4626.1855, B-O and Q and R).

Foodborne illness outbreaks can happen anywhere and can affect a large number of people. Follow these safe food handling tips to minimize the risk of foodborne illness.

Menu

The purpose of offering samples is to promote products of the farm or garden. Spices can now be added which couldn't legally be done before. Keep it simple! People want to sample whole fresh food.

Samples must be:

- Free
- A product sold by the vendor at the famers’ market
- Three ounces or less by weight or volume
- Offered as a single-serving and dispensed. No customer self-service. Condiments offered as single-serving such as squeeze bottles, individual packets, containers with lids or pump bottles.
- Prepared on-site at the farmers’ market. No home prepared food unless exempted such as canned products outline in the ‘pickle bill’ which are processed in a home kitchen but cut to serve samples on-site at the market.
- Identified with name of vendor providing the samples and/or organization doing food demonstrations
- Described via signage—be descriptive, i.e. zucchini bread with nuts
- Stopped when you run out
- Discarded if contamination occurs, at unsafe temperatures, and at end of day
Personal Health and Hygiene

Health and hygiene is the most important link to prevent a foodborne illness.

- You must not prepare or serve samples if ill with vomiting and/or diarrhea until at least 24 hours after symptoms end. Stay home if you are ill. Train volunteers to report illness.
- Wear clean clothing. Wear a scarf, hat, visor or hair restraint when preparing or serving food.
- Wash hands often and before handling food.
- If preparing food, no fingernail polish is allowed.
- Jewelry can harbor bacteria and can transfer to food. Do not wear rings or watches if preparing or serving food. A plain wedding band is allowed.
- Use gloves, scoops or utensils to serve food samples.
- Check hands for cuts and wounds. Cover cuts with a leak-proof bandage and wear gloves while preparing and serving food samples.
- Keep a list of workers. Record hours worked and contact information in case there is a foodborne illness outbreak.

Keep Hands Clean

Handwashing is one of the easiest, most effective ways to prevent foodborne illness.

Set-up handwashing station first before unpacking supplies or preparing food.

Supplies you need:

- A 5 – 15 gallon insulated, thermos type container with warm water 70-110°F (this temperature needs to be maintained during the entire time you are sampling or doing your food demonstration—verify this temperature with a food thermometer)
- Water needs to freely flow via the spigot or spout so there is a steady stream while washing hands. A turn style spout or flip-up type works well. Most thermoses can be retrofitted with this type of spout.
- Water needs to be potable from a municipal water supply or a well that is routinely tested (at least annually) for bacteria and nitrates must meet safe drinking water and well standards (Drinking Water Protection, Non-Community Transient Public Health System, Minnesota Department of Health (MDH), http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/water/)  
  • Soap
  • Nail brush; paper towels on a heavy stand
  • Container to catch wastewater—same size or larger than the water dispenser to prevent spill over of contaminated water
  • Trash container for paper towels—covered is best
  • Table or cart to hold the handwashing supplies—elevate water container at least 2 feet off the ground making it accessible to wash hands

- Locate the handwashing station within the stall/booth. Locate it so it is accessible but water does not splash on food or food contact surfaces during the handwashing process.
- Maintain enough water pressure in the container to adequately wash your hands. You need one gallon of water remaining in the container at all times—this is 2 inches above the faucet, spigot or spout.
- Bring extra water to fill container. If you run out of water or below the 2 inches, you need to stop sampling.
When to Wash Hands

- Wash hands often: Before preparing or serving samples; after handling raw foods; after coughing or blowing your nose; after handling garbage; after using the toilet (wash hands at hand sink and again when you return to your booth); after you handle money, after eating or drinking and any time they become contaminated.

How to Wash Hands

- Wet hands with running warm water
- Wash hands with lots of soap. Soap creates a slippery surface for the “germs” to slide off.
- Scrub under fingernails with a nail brush
- Scrub soapy hands together for at least 20 seconds
- Rinse under running water
- Dry hands using paper towels
- Turn spigot or faucet off with a paper towel to prevent recontamination of hands
- Handwashing with a nail brush poster is available from the Minnesota Department of Health
  http://www.health.state.mn.us/handhygiene/wash/nailbrush.pdf
- Gloves, wet-wipes, “waterless” hand sanitizers or washing hands in the dishwater buckets or sanitizer are not substitutes for handwashing.

Water

The water you use for handwashing, washing fruits and vegetables, and cleaning and sanitizing must be ‘potable’. Potable means it is drinkable water. It can come from:

- A municipal (public) water supply
- A private well if the well water is tested once a year for bacteria and nitrates and has met safe drinking water and well water standards
- You can transport your water via:
  - Portable containers if they are food-grade, clean and are of sufficient capacity for your sampling needs
  - Food-grade hose with an appropriate backflow device to prevent backflow of contaminated water into the clean water source. Hose must be flushed and sanitized before use.

Clean Produce

Wash all produce under running water before peeling, cutting or serving.

- Wash in a commercial licensed kitchen and transport to market in clean covered containers to prepare on-site or wash on-site using water from the handwashing station. To prevent splashing of water from the handwash waste water bucket/container, have a separate catch bucket/container for produce waste water
- Use a produce brush on firm skinned produce like carrots or apples
- Use clean, sanitized colanders, cutting boards, peelers, knives, etc. to prepare samples
Use Clean Equipment/Utensils

Think through your equipment needs—all utensils, tools, surfaces, appliances needed to transport, serve, hold/store, prepare, package or needed to offer food samples. Equipment must be clean, in good repair, smooth cleanable—no chips or cracks, food-grade and nonabsorbent.

When dirty equipment and utensils are used, microorganisms can transfer to food. Bring extra supplies in case of contamination or if dropped on the ground.

You have two options for using clean equipment/utensils:

Option 1: Bring enough clean utensils and equipment for preparation and serving so you never re-use a ‘dirty’ item during that day’s sampling event.

Option 2: Wash utensils and equipment at the market for re-use during your sampling and/or food demonstration event. You will need:

- Three containers, buckets, bins or tubs (need to be food-grade which means designed to hold food or items that touch food). Containers need to be large enough so the largest item you wash is fully immersed in the container.

1. Wash
2. Rinse
3. Sanitize
4. Air Dry

- You will need potable warm water to fill each bucket or container.
  - Label the first bucket as your ‘Wash’ bucket—fill with hot water (110°F) and dishwashing detergent
  - Label the second bucket ‘Rinse’ and fill with clean warm water
  - Label the third bucket ‘Sanitize’ and fill with warm water (75°F—follow the manufacturer directions on the label of the sanitizer). Test strips are required to verify the sanitizer concentration is correct—Chlorine bleach: 50 ppm; Iodine: 12.5 - 25 ppm; Quaternary ammonium: 200-400 ppm per label instructions.
  - You will need a place and a dish rack to air dry dishes. No towel drying allowed.

- Dishwashing is a 4 step process. Wash and sanitize dishes and utensils in this order:
  1. Wash in warm soapy water
  2. Rinse in clear water
  3. Sanitize items for 10 seconds for bleach, 30 seconds for quats. (Chlorine bleach recipe: Use 1 tablespoon regular bleach or 2.5 teaspoons ultra bleach per 1 gallon of water. Approved bleach: unscented, label has EPA Reg. No. and instructions for use on food contact surfaces).
  4. Air dry

- Bring extra thermos with hot water to change dishwashing wash, rinse and sanitize containers every two hours or more often depending upon use. You will also need a bucket for the wastewater.
Use Proper Sanitizing Solutions

Sanitizer concentration is very important. Too much can be toxic and too little will not be effective in killing pathogens that can make people sick.

- Use approved unscented sanitizers—label has EPA Reg. No. and instructions for use on food contact surfaces. Follow label directions for use.
- After sampling session, clean and sanitize thermos, nozzle or spigot, coolers and totes used for water or food. Wash with soapy water, inside and out. Rinse with clean water. Sanitize - 1 Tbsp. unscented regular chlorine bleach per 2 gallons water. Do NOT rinse. Air dry. (Source: Guidelines for Safe Handling of Drinking Water at Golf Courses, Minnesota Department of Health, December 2010)

Use a Food Thermometer

Eating undercooked foods can result in a serious foodborne illness outbreak.

- Bring and use a calibrated food thermometer to check cold holding, cooking and hot holding food temperatures.
- The following foods need to reach an internal temperature of:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product</th>
<th>Temperature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whole meats (chops, steaks, roasts)</td>
<td>145°F, plus 3 minute rest/stand time for safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ground meats</td>
<td>160°F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poultry, ground or whole</td>
<td>165°F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soup, stews, egg dishes, stuffing, casseroles, reheated foods</td>
<td>165°F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: USDA, Revised Cooking Temperature, May 2011*
Keep Hot Foods Hot

If hot foods are held below 140°F for longer than 4 hours, microorganisms will grow rapidly.

- Keep hot foods at 140°F or higher
- Use a food thermometer to check the temperature of hot foods
- Do not mix a fresh batch of a food item with an existing item
- To keep hot food hot, use hot plates, electric skillets, etc.
- Home crock pots are not allowed to hold hot foods. Every time you lift the cover it takes 20 minutes to recover the heat lost
- Any leftover food at the end of the day, must be discarded

Keep Cold Foods Cold

If cold foods are held above 40°F for longer than 4 hours, microorganisms grow rapidly.

- Keep cold foods at 40°F or lower. Verify with a food thermometer.
- Monitor the temperature of food at least every 4 hours to ensure it is at 40°F or colder; if it is above 40°F, discard the food
- Coolers (durable, insulated, cleanable with tight fitting covers) filled with ice packs, (not ice bags) or dry ice to keep cold foods at 40°F or below. **NOTE:** Mechanical refrigeration is required for food held longer than 4 hours. Plug-in coolers are an option.
- Coolers—You should have separate coolers:
  - One for raw products;
  - One for ready-to-eat products; and
  - One with ice for consumption if serving a beverage that you will add ice—like a smoothie. (Ice needs to be from a commercial source—no ice from your home refrigerator.) If you dispense ice be sure to use a scoop.
- Place an appliance thermometer in each cooler—available at variety and discount stores. Cooler should keep food at 40°F or lower.
- Ice may be used to cool beverages in water-tight containers. Tops of the containers (such as pop can lids) must be above the ice. Melting ice must drain into a catch bucket.
Location and Construction of Booth

Design your booth with food safety in mind. The design should protect from overhead and environmental contamination.

- Think about the safe flow of food from clean to dirty. Protect raw from ready-to-eat foods. Protect from customer contamination.
- A canopy or other overhead protection to protect food and surfaces from contamination is required
- Acceptable flooring surfaces are vinyl, sealed wood, concrete or asphalt. If on grass, dirt or gravel—cover with a non-absorbent mat, rubber or sealed plywood to control contamination from mud or dust
- Food preparation and cooking areas are protected from the public by a food shield or distance separation
- Store food off the ground at least 6 inches or in hard sided totes or coolers with covers. Set them on pallets, tables, shelving, etc.
- Store food and equipment away from chemicals (i.e. sanitizers, sunscreen, insect spray, soap, etc.)
- If there is adverse weather conditions, stop food sampling and/or demonstrations
- Remember your stand and vehicle are subject to inspection (even if you are exempt from licensing)—some jurisdictions charge an inspection fee. Some delegated agencies have stricter ordinances. Access your Minnesota licensing jurisdiction at [http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/food/license/](http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/food/license/).

Method of Liquid and Solid Waste Disposal

You need a plan to deal with liquid and solid waste collected during sampling and/or food demonstration.

- Provide waste containers with plastic liners in and outside your booth. They should be emptied often. You need to provide a garbage container for patrons to place their used sampling containers or utensils. At the end of the day, place garbage and paper waste in a refuse container with a tight fitting lid.
- Wastewater cannot be poured on the ground, in creeks, rivers or down a street or storm drains. Doing so can contaminate water sources.

Developed by Suzanne Driessen, Extension Educator, Food Safety, June 2014, Revised April 2015

References: M.S. 28A.151, Special event food stands 4626.1855; Special Event Food Stand. March 2014. Minnesota Department of Health.

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