

# **Food Sampling Guidelines and Procedures**

Providing 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. Since farmers' markets sell primarily on taste, sampling is a top marketing tool.

Your samples should represent your best. Samples of poor products do nothing to enhance your sales. Special care should be taken to ensure that the bite of your product that every customer receives will leave a favorable impression and encourage them to buy.

Unsafe sampling methods can contaminate food and result in food borne illness. Good marketing practices require that basic sanitation practices be followed when samples are offered at farmers' markets. Following a few, simple practices can reduce your risk.

The following guidelines are designed to give vendors the basic sanitation practices for sampling at farmers markets. The vendor offering samples assumes all liability and should look carefully at every step of their sampling to make the samples as safe as possible.

Vendors who wish to distribute samples of their products must comply with the "Farmers' Market Guidelines: as set by the Oregon Department of Agriculture: Food Safety Division. ([http://www.oda.state.or.us/Food\\_Safety/FSDINFO.html](http://www.oda.state.or.us/Food_Safety/FSDINFO.html)).

Remember, a sample is defined as *a food product promotion where only a bite-sized portion of a food or foods is offered free of charge to demonstrate its characteristics. A whole meal, individual hot dish or whole sandwich is not recognized as a sample.* If you want to offer ready to eat food service at a farmers' market you must obtain a Food Handlers permit. The details on obtaining the permit are outlined in another section of this guide.

## **The basics**

This guideline cannot cover every situation and product, but in every situation you must provide equipment and maintain practices that provide for:

- use of potable water
- all produce being clean
- all ingredients coming from an approved source
- clean hands
- clean utensils
- maintaining proper temperature

- delivering the samples to the customers in such a manner to prevent anyone from touching any sample other than the one they will consume
- protection of the samples from the elements and insects

### **Potable water**

All water that touches your product or your utensils **MUST** be potable. That is, the water should be drinking quality. Municipal water fits this category perfectly. If you have a water source like a well or cistern then all your water should be tested and found to be free of contaminants before you use it in the preparation of samples. Bottled water is readily available and can be used for sample preparation.

All water used at the market to wash produce, utensils and clean up should be disposed of properly and not poured out on the ground.

### **All produce being clean**

All raw produce **MUST** be washed thoroughly with running potable water. The water has to be running to carry away any dirt or contaminants that may be on the outside of the product. You cannot wash your tomatoes in a bucket of clean water. Produce with rinds pose a special problem. Cantaloupes and muskmelons with netting need a good scrubbing to remove all dirt and contaminants from deep in the netting. This can be done at home to all the produce you plan to use for samples. Make sure the washed produce is then packed in clean bags or containers to keep them clean and stored separate from unwashed food items until you arrive at the market.

### **All ingredients coming from an approved source**

All products used in your samples must come from an approved source. This means all agricultural products that will be served without cooking must have been raised according to Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) and any value-added product must be commercially produced or produced under these requirements. Information on the GAP principles, commercial production, and food safety are available from the ODA.

### **Clean hands**

You must have a way to wash your hands properly. Though a good addition to hand washing, hand sanitizers do not substitute for proper hand washing. Hand sanitizer does not remove soil or eliminate all contaminants. Gloves can be used but you must be careful to keep them uncontaminated.

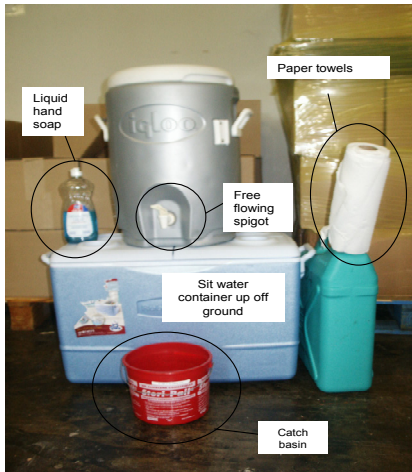
You should wash your hands or change your gloves:

- After using the bathroom and upon returning to your stand
- After handling money, unwashed produce, baskets, and anything not clean and sanitized
- Any time you leave your stand and return and handle samples in any way

Depending on the market setup, providing for hand washing may mean each vendor must have their own station. If vendors feel they can share a station it must be easily accessible with no physical impediments between the vendor and the station.

The basic items required for a proper hand washing station are:

- A container of potable water of sufficient size to have enough water for the entire sampling time with a free-flowing dispensing valve. The container should be raised off the ground to allow a catch basin under the spigot.
- One catch bucket for waste water that fits under the container of water's spigot.
- Paper towels
- Liquid hand washing soap in a pump or squeeze bottle.



Another option for a handwash station.  
This is a drink dispenser set on a tub.  
Paper towels and soap added

Though we have all washed our hands since childhood, the proper way for sanitation purposes includes the following:

- Wetting your hands
- Applying liquid soap
- Briskly rubbing your hands together – including fingernails and backs of hands for a minimum of 20 seconds (a long time!)
- Rinsing your hands under free flowing water
- Drying your hands with a disposable paper towel

### Clean utensils

All utensils that touch a sample in **any way** must be washed in a detergent, rinsed in clean potable water and **soaked for 60 seconds in a sanitizing solution.**

- If more than one or two different utensils are used, a cleaning, rinsing and sanitizing station is required. Sanitizing solution must be approx. 50 ppm of household bleach/water solution. This is approx. one capful of bleach to one gallon of water. The sanitizing container should be of sufficient size to completely immerse the largest utensil in use.
- If you are only using a few utensils, you may choose to bring a number of the utensils in a zip lock bag marked as “CLEAN” and bring with you another zip lock bag marked “DIRTY”. That way if you drop or soil a utensil a clean one is available and the dirty one can be easily distinguished and isolated. **THESE UTENSILS MUST BE SANITIZED AS WELL.**

- If one of the utensils you use is a knife then you must have a proper cutting board that must be handled like any other utensil – wash, rinse, sanitized.
- Use only plastic (nonabsorbent) or approved hardwood cutting boards or disposable paper plates for cutting produce for sampling.
- If samples of both meat and vegetables are going to be cooked and offered, there should be 3 separate sets of utensils. The first is for raw meat, the second for cooked meat and the third for vegetables and fruits.
- Allow all cleaned and sanitized utensils to air dry on a clean non-porous surface or dish rack. Do not dry with a towel.
- The “washing, rinsing and sanitizing station” and the “hand washing station” must be set up before preparing any samples.

Three tubs – one each for soapy water, clean water and sanitizing solution. Also soap, sanitizer and area where utensils can air dry.



### Proper temperature

- If you bring cold product to the market for sampling you must maintain them at 41°F or below. That means you probably must ice it above and below. If using ice, you need to make provisions for melted ice to drain away from the product.
- Any product you warm at the market must be warmed to 140°F or above. You must have a way to maintain this temperature.
- A high/low thermometer is a good investment. Note the temperature readings in your records in case there is ever any doubt.
- For both safety and quality, samples should be monitored to ensure that none remain out for more than 30 minutes. Remember you want your samples to perfect little bites of your product at its best.

### Sample delivery

- You must use disposable single use utensils for distribution of samples to customers- toothpicks, cups, etc. or you can use tongs, if you control them. Customers should never reach in a plate or bowl of samples.
- You should make available a waste basket lined with a plastic bag for sampling preparation waste and sampling distribution waste disposal. It works best to have two cans – one behind the table for your waste and one out in front for the customers.

- Thoroughly wash your hands before the market and as necessary to prevent contamination of the food.
- Use tooth picks, wax paper, paper sampling cups or disposable utensils to distribute samples. In this way each vendor and his workers can prevent the hands of customers from touching and contaminating the food. **EACH VENDOR'S DISPENSING METHOD MUST PREVENT CONTAMINATION BY THE CUSTOMER.**

### **Protection from the elements**

- All food shall be stored at least 6 inches off the ground.
- Keep all samples in a container with hinged lid or behind other approved sneeze, dust, insect and handling protection. Each vendor has the responsibility to protect against contamination of samples from sneezing or touching. If you cannot assure your sampling methods can meet this standard you will have to consider a new method or discontinue sampling all together

### **A word about allergies**

There are folks that visit your market that are highly allergic to nuts, milk products, glutes and other common ingredients. It is your responsibilities to let those sampling your value-added products know what is in your samples as well as if the product could have come in contact with allergens. If you have processed nuts or peanuts for addition to some of your value-added products in your kitchen be especially careful. Even if they are not in your product the dust from grinding or chopping may have come in contact with your other products. Remember you are responsible for any illness caused by your samples so err on the side of caution at all times.

## **Insurance**

There are two types of insurance purchased by farmers' markets and/or farmers' market vendors – overall liability (slip and fall) and product liability. Insurance is frequently a large expense. Markets are encouraged to fully understand the policy they are purchasing and shop around for the best coverage and rates.

The kind of policy your market should purchase and how much coverage you need should be discussed with an insurance professional. Here is a basic description of the two types.

### **Liability**

Liability insurance covers the market for accidents that may occur at the market during business hours, such as customer falls and injuries. Some folks call these "slip and fall" policies. Because vendors themselves could get injured while at

the market, markets may wish to include a “hold harmless” clause as part of the market rules in which the vendors agree not to hold the market liable for injuries and damage that they might incur. This type of policy does not cover illness that may result from spoiled products.

## **Product liability**

Product liability policies cover the individual vendors from liability from the products they have sold. Producers who sell value-added products may want to purchase this type of insurance. Policy cost is usually based on your gross sales. Most companies have a minimum policy that reflects higher gross sales than most farmers’ market vendors enjoy.

Your farm policy may or may not cover you so check with your insurance professional.

To help protect themselves from liability claims, value-added product producers should carefully follow the correct procedures and keep meticulous records on the steps and safety best practices used in every batch of product they make.