



KNOX COUNTY TENNESSEE

HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Guidance for Sampling at Farmers Markets

The Knox County Health Department recognizes the impact sampling has on a successful farmers market experience for the vendor and the customer. Adherence to food safety principles is important to ensure each sample offered will result in a positive experience for each customer. Foodborne illness resulting from improper sampling methods could create an unfavorable image for the vendor and the market.

Each individual market organizer reserves the right to accept the food vendors of their choosing and to require more stringent guidelines related to food service and sampling. The guidance below is intended to facilitate expectations for market organizers and vendors, as well provide a best practice approach to offering samples at a farmers' market.

Product Sources

- All food product to be sampled must come from an approved source or be exempted by TN State Law. The applicable license or permit and product labeling must be in place for any approved product to be sampled at a market.

Approved sources include:

- Licensed distributors & manufacturers*
- Licensed commercial kitchens in health**
- Licensed retail markets***

Unapproved sources include:

- Time/temperature control for safety food (TCS) items prepared in a domestic kitchen.
- Any food item prepared in a domestic kitchen that does not meet the requirements of the TN Food Freedom Act.

Exempt Sources:

- Direct sale produce & eggs
- Non-TCS, packaged foods that meet the TN Food Freedom Act

**Manufacturers and distributors are licensed by the TDA or USDA to process and distribute food product. Examples of manufacturing would include Springer Mountain, Strong Stock Farm, Tellico Grains, etc. Distributors would include Gordons, US Foods, Valley Produce, etc.*

***A restaurant with a food service establishment permits from the TDH.*

****Any grocery store or market that receives product from a manufacturer or distributor and provides that product for sale.*

General guidelines for sampling

- Hands should be washed under running water with liquid soap and dried with a single use towel prior to engaging in sampling activities.
- Gloves may be worn as a barrier to prevent cross contamination of ready-to-eat foods.
 - Wash hands before applying gloves.
 - Change gloves before starting a new task, especially in between monetary transactions.
 - If gloves become torn, ripped, or contaminated, they should be changed.
 - Never reuse gloves.
- Avoid cross-contamination of surfaces.
 - Cleanse food contact surfaces frequently with sanitizer wipes.
- Replace in-use utensils frequently if soiled or contaminated.
 - You may choose to bring several utensils in a zip lock bag marked as “CLEAN” and another zip lock bag marked “DIRTY”.
- All samples should be offered in a way that prevents customers from touching any other sample.
 - All samples should be individually portioned using individual serving cups, small spoons/forks, toothpicks, etc.
 - Protection for the samples from the elements and insects must be provided.
- Abide by temperature requirements, i.e., TCS samples must be kept below 41 °F or above 135 °F OR utilize time as a public health control with accompanying written procedures (see description below).
- Do not work with food when ill.
 - Symptoms of exclusion include vomiting, diarrhea, sore throat with fever, cuts/lesions, jaundice.
 - Report to the health department if you have Hepatitis A, Shigella, E. coli, Salmonella typhi or non-typhoid Salmonella.

Perishable food items

- The FDA refers to perishable food items as “time/temperature control for safety food” (TCS). By this, they mean a perishable food item requires time or temperature control to limit pathogenic growth or toxin formation, which can make the person consuming the food item sick.
- Temperature control for TCS items means the product is kept below 41 °F or above 135 °F using an adequate cold source or heat source.
- If temperature control cannot be achieved, time as a public health control should be implemented with a written procedure to be on hand at each market day.
 - Written procedures are to include a list of specific foods being monitored with time and description of how time will be tracked, and the method used.
 - Utilize a stem thermometer to monitor temperatures.
 - The temperature of the TCS product should be logged according to the written procedures.
- Not all TCS food items are suitable for sampling at a farmers’ market.
 - Examples of acceptable items from approved sources to sample would include dairy products, raw produce, fresh fruits, baked goods, jams, jellies, sauces, dips, and spices.
- If product or sample is left between 41 °F and 135 °F (the danger zone) for 4 hours, a best practice is to discard the product.