

Guide to Operating a Successful Home-Based Food Business

Since 2012, the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) has allowed producers to sell non-potentially hazardous food directly to the consumer without a food processing permit if certain conditions are met. Non-potentially hazardous foods are foods that do not easily support the growth of dangerous bacteria and do not require temperature control for safety.

Exemption requirements

Producers of food under the Alaska Food Code Cottage Foods exemptions must meet the following conditions:

- Have and be able to provide detailed knowledge about the ingredients of the food product and how it was processed, prepared and packaged.
- Have the food product formulation or recipe available at the point of sale in case there is ever a concern about the safety of the product. This information must be maintained by the producer and be available if DEC or consumers have questions regarding the product. For a product that is pickled or dried, the producer may need to have information available about the pH or water activity. Producers may work with UAF Cooperative Extension Service or test their own product to show that it is safe.
- Process, prepare, package and sell the product only in Alaska.
- Make sure the person who sells directly to the consumer knows what ingredients were used to make the product and how the food was prepared and packaged. This individual must be able to answer consumers' questions about the product, including whether allergens are present in the food product. In order to qualify for the exemption, the processor may not distribute the product to stores or restaurants, or by mail order or on consignment. The product can be sold through an online "food hub" that has received a DEC variance to sell Cottage Foods.
- Keep total receipts of sales of all food items sold under this exemption to demonstrate that gross sales do not exceed \$25,000 within a calendar year.

- If the food is not prepared in a permitted, approved or inspected kitchen, the producer must inform the consumer by a placard or sign placed in a conspicuous area that says: "THESE PRODUCTS ARE NOT SUBJECT TO STATE INSPECTION." Alternately, this statement can be placed on a label.
- Label packaged food with either
 - the Alaska business license number or
 - the name, physical address and telephone number of the individual who prepared the food to allow DEC to trace the product back to the producer if there is a problem or complaint.

Knowledge

Producers of food under the exemption are expected to be knowledgeable and able to communicate with consumers about the ingredients used in the food and how the food was processed and packaged. This is critical because many consumers with allergies or other food sensitivities will be making an important health-related decision about whether to purchase and consume the product based on this information.

The producer and sales person must be able to answer the following questions:

- What ingredients were used to make the product?
- Do any of those ingredients contain sub-ingredients? (For example, margarine contains soy, a major food allergen.)
- Do any of those ingredients contain allergens?
- What types of foods do you prepare in your kitchen? Are any of them allergens?

The Eight Major Food Allergens

eggs	peanuts
dairy	tree nuts
fish	wheat
soybeans	crustacean shellfish

This publication is a collaborative effort between the University of Alaska Fairbanks Cooperative Extension Service and the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation.



Non-potentially hazardous foods

Baked goods	<p>Most baked goods are considered non-potentially hazardous foods because they are cooked to high enough temperatures to kill any bacteria that may be harmful. This, combined with their low water activity, makes them fairly shelf-stable.</p> <p>Exceptions include baked goods with cream-based fillings, custards, whipped cream or meringue, and toppings with vegetables or cheese, which require refrigeration to maintain the safety of the products. These items are not included under these exemptions and a DEC permit may be required.</p>
Pickled vegetables and fruits	<p>Pickled or acidified foods are products that are shelf-stable because their pH is below 4.6 and they have been processed in a hot-water bath to ensure that the jar is properly sealed and sterilized.</p> <p>To safely produce pickled foods, see Extension publications <i>Bullwhip Kelp</i>, FNH-00131; <i>Zucchini from A-Z</i>, FNH-00260; <i>Beets</i>, FNH-00561A; <i>Pickles and Relishes</i>, FNH-00735; <i>So Easy to Preserve</i>, MGA-00989 (\$25).</p>
Fermented foods*	<p>Fermented foods such as sauerkraut, some kinds of pickles and green olives are low-acid foods that are exposed to conditions that allow acid-producing microorganisms to reduce the pH of the food to 4.6 or below.</p> <p>To safely produce fermented foods, see Extension publications <i>Sauerkraut</i>, FNH-00170.</p>
Canned acidic foods: salsas and sauces**	<p>Canned acidic foods are products that are shelf-stable because their pH is below 4.6 and they have been processed in a hot-water bath to ensure that the jar is properly sealed and sterilized. The pH of tomatoes varies from 4.0 to 4.7, depending on the variety and the ripeness of the fruit. This is why it is important to test the final pH of these products to determine if additional vinegar or another acid is necessary.</p> <p>To safely produce acidic foods, see Extension publications <i>Canning Tomatoes and Tomato Products</i>, FNH-00171; <i>Canning Acidic Foods: Fruits</i>, FNH-00710.</p>
Dehydrated foods	<p>Foods that have the majority of their water removed do not support the growth of dangerous bacteria or molds. A water activity value of less than 0.88 is considered safe.</p> <p>To safely produce dehydrated foods, see Extension publications <i>Fruit Leather</i>, FNH-00228; <i>Drying Fruits and Vegetables</i>, FNH-00745.</p>
Jams and jellies	<p>Jams and jellies have very little water available for bacteria to grow because of the combination of high sugar content and the acidity of the fruits used to produce the product.</p> <p>To safely produce jams and jellies, see Extension publications <i>Jams and Jellies</i>, FNH-00730.</p>

* See Fermented Foods, page 3.

** See Sauces and Salsas, page 3.

Recipe formulation of non-potentially hazardous foods

Recipe formulation is important because a producer must be able to assure that the product being sold is a non-potentially hazardous food. A good method to determine whether a product is non-potentially hazardous is to determine if it requires refrigeration to keep it safe or to preserve it. If it does not require refrigeration at any time, it is most likely non-potentially hazardous. If producers are unsure about the safety of their product or whether it requires refrigeration for safety, they should contact their local Cooperative Extension Service office or the DEC.

There are several considerations in determining whether a food is non-potentially hazardous, including pH, water activity, the interaction between the water activity and pH, heat treatment (cooking) and packaging. The pH and water activity values that define a non-potentially hazardous food are included in **Appendix A**.

Foods that are heat-treated (cooked) to eliminate the vegetative cells of bacteria need to be addressed differently than a raw product with no, or inadequate, heat treatment.

Examples of non-potentially hazardous foods include jams, jellies, pickled vegetables, bread, kettle popcorn, confections, trail mix, granola, tortillas, fry bread, fermented fruit and vegetable products, pastries, and waffle cones. For a more extensive list see **Appendix B**.

Low-Acid Food

Because the risk to the public health is too great, DEC does not allow the sale of home-canned, low-acid vegetables (e.g., canned green beans not pickled or fermented), meat, poultry or seafood products of any kind.

Acidified Food

Acidified foods are low-acid foods to which acid(s) or acid food(s) are added. They have a finished equilibrium pH of 4.6 or below. (18 AAC 31.990).

*Fermented Foods

(FDA Draft Guidance for Industry: Acidified Foods, September 2010). Once the fermentation process is completed, the fermented food will have a pH that is well below 4.6, which will prevent the growth of pathogenic bacteria such as *Clostridium botulinum* or *Salmonella*. Fermented foods are susceptible to molds. Mold growth can be prevented by keeping the product refrigerated after fermentation or by processing the product in a hot-water bath.

If you have any questions on the safety of the processing methods you are using, refer to Extension publications and at www.uaf.edu/ces/pubs/catalog or go to the Preserving Alaska's Bounty playlist on UAF Extension's YouTube site for video training materials.

In addition, Extension agents or DEC food safety and sanitation personnel will be glad to consult with you on proper procedures for food preservation.

**Sauces and Salsas

Salsas that qualify under this exemption contain tomatoes, other vegetables and some type of acidic ingredient such as vinegar or lemon juice. Most sauces like barbecue or hot sauce are acidic (pH below 4.6) and therefore pose little health risk. Any salsa or sauce that a producer wants to make under this exemption must have a pH test performed on it to ensure that the pH is low enough (has enough acid) so that no potentially harmful organisms may grow in it. Fresh salsas require pH testing to qualify under this exemption.

The equilibrium pH of tomatoes varies from approximately 4.0 to 4.7, depending on the variety and the ripeness of the fruit. This is why it is important to test the final pH of these products to determine if additional vinegar or another acid is necessary.

Hot-Water Bath Process

In a hot-water bath, food is heated sufficiently to destroy most bacteria and molds. Acidifying controls the growth of bacteria, such as *Clostridium botulinum* (botulism), that are not killed during the hot water bath process.

Product testing

To ensure that your product(s) have the proper pH and water activity (A_w) to be non-potentially hazardous, have your product tested.

Product testing is available in Alaska at these two locations, or contact a private testing company:

[Alaska DEC Laboratory Services](#)

5251 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Ave.
Anchorage, AK, 99507
907-375-8200

[Kodiak Seafood and Marine Science Center](#)

Attn: Chris Sannito
118 Trident Way
Kodiak, AK 99615
907-486-1500

There will be a cost for each sample for testing PH and water activity; inquire about current costs at either of these locations.

Alternatively, your local Cooperative Extension Service office may have a digital pH meter for your use. Your local Extension office will not be able to test water activity.

Procedure for testing

1. Call the test location first to determine what shipping and handling procedures must be followed.
2. Ship your samples.
3. Expect a turnaround time of approximately four weeks.
4. For questions regarding test results, contact the Cooperative Extension Service or your local DEC Environmental Health Officer.

Documentation: recipe or product formulation

A producer's recipe is proprietary information; however, a detailed list of ingredients must be available on request to answer questions from consumers.

Your complete recipe formulation must be made available for the regulatory authority (i.e., DEC or the Municipality of Anchorage) for review if there are any questions about whether your product is a potentially hazardous food and safe to be sold under the exemption. A producer should also have documentation on any product testing that has been completed. Examples of documentation could include:

- Laboratory results for pH or water activity
- Records of pH testing with a pH meter by the producer
- A letter from a process authority

A *process authority* is a qualified person who has expert knowledge acquired through appropriate training and experience in the processing of foods.

See **Appendix D for example documentation of pH or water activity from a lab.**

See **Appendix E for an example of how to properly formulate a recipe.**

Where you may sell your product

You may sell your product in the state of Alaska as long as you are not within the Municipality of Anchorage. If you intend to sell within the [Municipality of Anchorage](#), contact the municipality to determine its regulatory

requirements.

All transfer of goods must be face-to-face. Advertising, marketing and sales may be done online or through social media, but the transfer of a product must be in person with the consumer who is purchasing the food.

If selling your product through a farmers market, food hub, or "online farmers market," contact the market directly to learn about additional requirements or restrictions regarding the sale of your product.

Who may sell your product

The intention of this regulation is to ensure that the producer sells his or her own product directly to the consumer. However, there are some cases in which someone else may be able to sell your product for you. An individual such as a family member or friend who directly assists with production and is fully knowledgeable about the production method and ingredients may also sell your food products to consumers. This allows the consumer to speak directly with the person(s) who prepared the food to discuss any pertinent questions in regard to that product. If someone else were allowed to sell your food, they may not be able to fully answer questions or discuss potential concerns.

You may sell your food directly to the consumer only. This means the person that is purchasing the food product from you is using it for personal use only and will not be reselling it to the best of your knowledge. Retail entities are responsible for ensuring that their food products come from an approved source. If they purchase your food for retail sale knowing that it does not come from an approved source, you will not be held liable. The visible placard with the statement "This Product is Not Subject to State Inspection" will ensure that this message is conveyed and a wholesaler does not accidentally purchase your product for resale.

Limits on sales volume

To operate within the Alaska DEC Cottage Food Exemption, gross receipts from sales of your exempt products may not exceed \$25,000.

What counts as gross receipts? What doesn't count? What part of business counts as gross receipts?

Gross Receipts

Gross receipts are the total amounts the organization or business received from all sources during its annual accounting period, without subtracting any costs or expenses.

Labeling and placards

The labeling and placard requirements are important so customers can understand that they are purchasing a product that has not been regulated by any agency. It allows customers to make informed decisions about purchasing your product and also allows wholesalers or other food businesses to know that your product cannot be purchased for resale in their retail location(s).

If the product that you are selling is sold in a packaged form, it must comply with some basic label requirements. Your booth and/or your labels must conspicuously display the following statement:

“THESE PRODUCTS ARE NOT SUBJECT TO STATE INSPECTION.”

In addition, packaged food must include the following on its label(s):

- Alaska business license number **or**
- Name of producer (you or your business name), physical address and telephone number

Though not required, you may wish to include the following items:

- Ingredient list (in descending order from most to least abundant ingredient)
- Allergen statement
- Net weight or net volume of product
- Nutrition Facts Label

Assistance with labeling is available through the DEC guidance document [Labeling Packaged Food](#).

We recommend that you take advantage of some great free publicity by registering your products with the Made In Alaska Program. For more details, visit <https://commerce.alaska.gov/web/dcra/MadeInAlaska.aspx>.

If you are selling an agricultural product, take advantage of the Alaska Grown Program as well. For more details, visit http://dnr.alaska.gov/ag/ag_AKGrown.htm.

Safe preparation

Ensuring that your home-prepared food is safe to the consumer is paramount to the success of your small business. To further your knowledge of safe food handling, consider obtaining your Alaska Food Worker Card from Alaska DEC (<https://dec.alaska.gov/eh/fss/food-worker-card/>). This costs \$10 and gives you a basic food safety certification. For a more in-depth food safety course, consider the certified food protection manager certification training (<https://dec.alaska.gov/eh/fss/food/resources/>

[cfpm-training](#)).

Take these following precautions to provide the safest product to your consumers:

Food should be processed at times when there are no other activities in the kitchen. Small children or pets should not be allowed into the kitchen while you are preparing or packaging products for sale. Only individuals doing food preparation should be allowed in the kitchen during food processing.

Preparing products for sale while making a meal, doing laundry or washing dishes increases the likelihood for cross-contamination.

Before you begin

- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds. If you do anything that will contaminate your hands, such as coughing, blowing your nose, eating, handling garbage, using the toilet or handling raw animal foods such as eggs, wash your hands again.
- Clean and sanitize all surfaces by washing with hot, soapy water, rinsing and then wiping or spraying surfaces with a 50-100 parts per million (ppm) bleach solution. Allow the bleach solution to air dry so it has adequate time to sanitize the surface.

To make a proper bleach solution in a spray bottle:

- Use ¼ to ½ teaspoon of nonscented bleach per quart of water. In this case, more is not better; a too-high concentration of bleach may leave a toxic residue.
- Use cool water — not hot — to make up your sanitizer solution. If you use water that is too hot, the bleach will rapidly disappear from the solution.
- The bleach water should not be used to clean up a spill. You should first clean the surface with hot, soapy water and then apply the bleach solution.
- Be sure to check the concentration of your bleach frequently with chlorine test strips. They are a reliable way to ensure your bleach cleaning solutions are properly mixed. Chlorine test strips can be purchased from restaurant supply companies. These test strips will last a long time if kept away from moisture.
- Change your bleach solution frequently. If it gets contaminated with foods, detergents or fats and oils, it will not be an effective sanitizer.

When cleaning, pay special attention to cutting boards

as they are a common source of cross contamination.

All chemicals and cleaning compounds should be stored away from your food preparation area or safely stored in a cupboard.

Protect your perishables

- Keep all perishable ingredients such as milk and eggs refrigerated until use. Bacteria grow quickly in these foods at room temperature. Ideal refrigerator temperature is 41°F or lower. Keep a thermometer in your refrigerator so you can make sure that your refrigerator is holding food at safe temperatures.

Packaging and transport

Now that you have prepared a safe product in your home, it is important to ensure that your product continues to be protected from hazards until it is consumed.

- Make sure to wrap or cover all products to protect them from possible contamination during transportation, storage or display.
- Use tongs or disposable gloves to keep from handling your products while packaging them or dispensing them to the customer.
- Package individually wrapped items at home ahead of time.

Community Kitchens

Consider using a community kitchen, (e.g. a church or school kitchen, or a kitchen approved by DEC instead of your home kitchen.

Get creative with your packaging. Most people want the products that they purchase from farm stands or farmers markets to have that “country” or homemade feel to them. Also consider gift packaging. Bundling your items into a gift basket is a great way to increase the amount of money you make per transaction.

Getting your business off on the right foot

Make sure that your business has all of the legal requirements in place so that you do not run into any problems while starting out.

Obtain a business license from the State of Alaska

This costs \$50 per year. Anyone doing business in Alaska must purchase a [business license](#) no matter how small the enterprise may be.

Look into product liability insurance.

Product liability insurance for cottage foods producers is available through a few different avenues. If you are selling at a farmer’s market that requires liability insurance for vendors, you may be able to be added as additionally insured directly through your market’s plan. Contact your market manager to learn if this is an option. There are also policies online that can be found through an Internet search for “cottage foods liability insurance”; or contact an Alaska insurance company to learn if it supports cottage foods liability insurance plans.

Consider your maximum gross receipt of sales

Ensure that your business will be operating within the legal profit margins discussed in the DEC exemptions (18 AAC 31.012).

Obtain pH and water activity tests when applicable

Do this before you begin commercial production.

Wild-harvested or foraged foods gathered from land you do not own

If you are interested in using wild-harvested products obtained from land not owned by you, you will need to contact and meet the requirements of the land owner.

For example, if you want to use ingredients harvested from state lands in your product for commercial sale, you must follow the state regulations for commercial harvesting. Make sure to read and fully comprehend the Alaska Non-Timber Forest Products Harvest Manual: For Commercial Harvest on State-Owned Lands prior to harvesting. Alaska non-timber forest products are regulated through Alaska DNR’s Division of Mining, Land and Water. For more information on the program and who to contact, please visit <https://dnr.alaska.gov/mlw/lands/permitting/ntfp-commercial-harvest-permit/register/>. Permits for commercial harvest cost \$100 plus applicable per unit fees. Permits are valid for 12 months from date of issue.

To harvest ingredients from tribally-owned, federal or private land, you must contact that entity for permission and regulations.

At the market

Booth Design

Be creative with your displays and signage. Simple things like bright, colored signs and cloth can draw people’s attention and help them remember where your booth is located.

Product Display

Consumers want clean food. Be sure that your products, table and display are clean and that your food products

look fresh throughout the day. Use baskets or trays in your display to offset your products. Put some items up higher than others to make your booth look both more attractive and more bountiful.

You as a vendor

Vendors should have a nice clean appearance. If you are dirty, consumers may think your food is dirty too. If there are multiple sellers at your booth, consider a uniform of sorts, such as matching shirts, hats or aprons.

Vendors should stand at their booths, look alert and be amenable to the customer's needs. Engage your customers in conversation about your products. This is a great way to help them remember who you are and what you sell, increasing the likelihood they will return to your booth in the future.

Finally, smart phones have applications available that allow you to take credit cards. This may help increase the number of clients who can purchase your product.

Samples

Samples can be a very important part of your stand. They are a great way to introduce customers to new products and increase their purchases. They also draw customers to your booth, making you look busier. However, be sure to SAFELY provide samples. The sample should be no bigger than one small bite. You want people to buy the product, not fill up on the sample! Cover your sample plate with either a mesh or plastic cover to keep any bugs or other debris off of your sample. Have toothpicks available for the consumer to use to take a sample. Make sure to have clearly labeled containers for "new" toothpicks and "used" toothpicks. To minimize your work and possible contamination at the booth, portion samples in your home kitchen. If you must portion your samples on site, make sure to have clean utensils, cutting boards, gloves and a temporary hand-washing station.

Using technology

Use social media platforms to promote your business and inform the public about your company events and promotions. A presence on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter will help you connect with clients and potential clients; create a blog to tell stories and release news about your business.

Facebook: Create a Facebook page to share news and information about your product — post photos, videos, and news articles to engage your audience and attract new audience members. Aim for three to five Facebook posts per week, and include a mix of company updates, industry news and local news that relates to your product. An endless stream of self-promotion does not add value to your clients' Facebook timelines, so share a variety of posts to

keep users interested in your page.

In order to create a business page, Facebook requires you to also have a personal profile. In addition to sharing content from your Facebook page, make sure you dedicate time each week to liking, commenting and sharing content from other people and/or pages from your Facebook page profile. This will help you increase your reach on Facebook and put your page in front of new eyes.

Facebook has many useful functions to help you create an efficient, effective social media strategy, including analytics with insights about your audience, a scheduler that allows you to automatically publish status updates, and photo/video tools to help you create eye-catching media content.

Twitter: Brevity is the key when it comes to communicating on Twitter — you're limited to just 280 characters per message, or "tweet," including spaces, punctuation, URLs and photos. Developing a daily Twitter habit is a good idea; just a few tweets a day will keep you visible to your audience. Again, consider sharing a variety of information about not just your business but also your fellow small business owners and the greater community around you.

Hashtags are as important as ever and are now used on Facebook as well as on Instagram. To create a hashtag simply place a pound sign (#) in front of a word or phrase without any spaces (for example, #Fairbanks, #Alaska, #FoodieFriday). A hashtag creates a searchable link where you can view tweets and profiles of other people and businesses also employing that hashtag; this is a great way to connect with other people who share your interests and track trends relevant to your business.

Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and other social media platforms have tools that allow you to share content between them, so you can share something once but have it published on multiple platforms — this is an efficient timesaver, especially when you are sharing "on-the-go" from your mobile device.

If you enjoy writing and sharing photos, you may want to create and maintain a blog for your business. Tell stories about your company and employees and the companies and individuals with whom you work in your community, and share industry news. A blog allows you to tell your own story in your own words.

When dealing with a negative comment or unhappy customer online, be courteous and professional and reply in as timely a manner as possible. Acknowledge their complaint, offer to make it right and ask them to contact you offline to continue the process of rectifying their issue.

Be Professional

Whether you choose to use Facebook, Twitter or both, make sure to be professional, but also remember that people want to feel like they are following a real person. Be authentic, use your own voice and try to connect with people at a real level.

Appendix A

Refer to this table for food products that are heat treated and then immediately packaged.

Interaction of pH and Water Activity for Control of Spores in Food Heat-treated to Destroy Vegetative Cells and Subsequently Packaged			
Water Activity Values	pH Values		
	4.6 or less	greater than 4.6 and no greater than 5.6	
0.92 or less	non-PHF*	non-PHF*	
greater than 0.92 and no greater than 0.95	non-PHF*	non-PHF*	PA**
greater than 0.95	non-PHF*	PA**	PA**
<p>* non-PHF means non-potentially hazardous food ** PA means a variance granted under 18 AAC 31.930 is required to consider the food non-PHF This table is from the Alaska Food Code 18 AAC 31.985 Definition of potentially hazardous foods (PHF).</p>			

Appendix B

Refer to this table for food products that are not packaged or jarred but could also include fermented foods that are dispensed on site.

Interaction of pH and Water Activity for Control of Vegetative Cells and Spores in Food Not Heat-treated or Heat-treated but Not Packaged				
Water Activity Values	pH Values			
	less than 4.2	no less than 4.2 and no greater than 4.6	greater than 4.6 and no greater than 5.0	greater than 5.0
less than 0.88	non-PHF*	non-PHF*	non-PHF*	non-PHF*
go less than 0.88 and greater than 0.90	non-PHF*	non-PHF*	non-PHF*	PA**
greater than 0.90 and no greater than 0.92	non-PHF*	non-PHF*	PA**	PA**
greater than 0.92	non-PHF*	PA**	PA**	PA**
<p>* non-PHF means non-potentially hazardous food ** PA means a variance granted under 18 AAC 31.930 is required to consider the food non-PHF This table is from the Alaska Food Code 18 AAC 31.985 Definition of potentially hazardous foods (PHF).</p>				

Appendix C

Example of a recipe/product formulation

Anytime you update your blog, share the link with followers on Facebook and Twitter.

Description of food being produced:

Pickled beets, 1-pint glass jars

Recipe makes about 8 pints

Product formulation:

beets, red	7 pounds
vinegar	1 quart
salt	1½ teaspoon
sugar	1½ cup
water	2 cups
onions, yellow	1 pound

Equipment:

cutting board
knife
stock pot
4-quart saucepan
water bath canner
spoons
chopstick
pint glass jars
lids and rings
jar lifter
1-quart saucepan
paper towel
cloth towels

Process of preparation:

1. Trim beet tops, leaving 1 inch of stem and root on each.
2. Wash beets thoroughly with cool water.
3. Sort beets to three size groups.
4. Cook each batch until tender (25–30 minutes)
5. Drain and discard liquid from saucepan.
6. Cool beets.
7. Trim stems and roots off beets.
8. Slice beets into ¼-inch-thick slices. Set aside.
9. Peel and slice onion in ⅛-inch to ¼-inch slices. Set aside.
10. Combine vinegar, salt, sugar and water in 4-quart saucepan.
11. Bring vinegar mixture to a boil.
12. Add beets and onions to vinegar mixture.
13. Simmer for 5 minutes.
14. Add 2 inches of water to water-bath canner.
15. Wash glass pint jars in hot, soapy water; rinse thoroughly and air dry.
16. Place clean, dry jars right-side up on cloth towel.
19. Fill pint jars with beets and onions leaving ½ inch headspace in each jar.
20. Add hot vinegar mixture to each jar, leaving ½ inch headspace.
21. Use the chopstick to settle contents in each jar and remove excess air.
22. Wipe jar rims with damp paper towel.
23. Place one flat lid on top of each jar. Screw on closure ring to finger-tight.
24. Add enough hot water to water-bath canner to make sure that all jars will be submerged by 1 inch of water.
25. Gently place filled and closed pint jars into water-bath canner; close with canner lid.
26. Bring filled water-bath canner to a boil.
27. Once water is boiling, process for 30 minutes.
28. Turn off heat under water-bath canner; wait 5 minutes for boiling to subside.
29. Remove jars from water-bath canner using the jar lifter and place right-side up on a cloth towel to cool for 12 hours.
30. Check jar seals, wash jars and label.
31. Pack into cases of 12.

COTTAGE FOOD EXEMPTIONS

Food sold under the Alaska Food Code exemption 18 AAC 31.012(a).

Alaska Food Code allows for the sale of non-potentially hazardous foods to be sold directly to the consumer without a permit as long as certain conditions are met. For food to fall under this exemption, it must be sold directly to the consumer, gross sales must not exceed \$25,000, and it must be properly labeled per the exemptions.

What foods are exempt?

There are many foods that fall under this exemption, including:

Baked Goods

- Breads (or similar baked goods)³
- Cakes (including celebration cakes)³
- Sweet breads and muffins that contain fruits or vegetables (e.g., pumpkin or zucchini bread)³
- Cooked fruit pies³
- Cookies³
- Baked goods that contain alcohol (e.g., rum cake)
- Crackers³

Bottled/Jarred Items

- Jams and jellies in glass jars that can be stored at room temperature³
- Vinegars (including flavored vinegars)³
- Mustards²
- Extracts, including vanilla and lemon extract³
- Pickles²
- BBQ sauces²
- Salsas²
- Relishes²
- Ketchup²
- Bottled carbonated beverages³
- Juices (berry and rhubarb)²

Candies/Confections

- Fudge³
- Truffles³
- Brittles³
- Chocolate covered pretzels, marshmallows, graham crackers or fruit. ³

Fermented Products

- Kombucha^{2, 3}
- Fermented fruit and vegetable products (e.g., sauerkraut and kimchee)²

Other Products

- Baked product mixes (e.g., pancake, cake or cookie mix)³
- Dried soup or dip mixes³
- Dehydrated vegetables or fruit³
- Popcorn, popcorn balls³
- Dry herbs and dry herb mixtures³
- Dried pasta made with eggs¹
- Nuts, coated or uncoated³
- Roasted coffee and dried tea
- Waffle cones³
- Tortillas³
- Flat breads (including elephant ears)³
- Fruit leathers³

The superscript refers to the type of product testing that must be done to demonstrate that the product is not potentially hazardous. See Cottage Food Product Testing on next page for more information.

- 1 Water activity test must be done on the product and kept on file.
- 2 PH test must be conducted on the product and kept on file.
- 3 Recipe and description of process must be kept on file.

What foods are not exempt?

Potentially hazardous foods that require time and/or temperature control for safety are not allowed to be produced under this exemption. Examples of foods that are not allowed include:

- Meat and meat products including fresh and dried meats (jerky)
- Fish and fish products (e.g., smoke salmon, canned salmon, etc.)
- Raw seed sprouts
- Garlic in oil mixtures
- Baked products that require refrigeration (e.g., cheesecake, custards, lemon meringue)
- Cheeses
- Dairy products (including ice cream)
- Non-acidic canned foods (i.e., canned vegetables that are not pickled or fermented)
- Pesto
- Fresh vegetable juices
- Food products made with cooked vegetables that are not acidified
- Bottled water

COTTAGE FOOD PRODUCT TESTING Q & A

Food sold under the Alaska Food Code exemption 18 AAC 31.012(a).

Why are foods required to be tested?

The regulation requires that documentation of demonstrating product safety be provided upon request. You must demonstrate that either pH, water activity or both are sufficient to prevent dangerous bacteria from growing. Please see the Cottage Food Exemptions fact sheet on previous page for information regarding what type of testing is required for the type of product.

What kind of testing do I need to do?

For products like salsas, pickled vegetables and fermented foods, a pH test result of 4.6 or below is needed. For products like dehydrated foods, a water activity test result of 0.88 or below is required.

I want to sell baked goods. Do I need to get a water activity or pH test?

If your baked goods are non-potentially hazardous (i.e., no cream cheese frosting, custards, meringues, etc.), then the only documentation that you will need to provide is recipe formulation.

Where can I get my product tested?

Any number of food labs would be able to test your product. You can check around locally to see if anyone

can provide that service. Otherwise, the Alaska DEC Environmental Laboratory Services, Kodiak Seafood and Marine Science Center or Cooperative Extension Services can provide pH and water activity testing at a minimal cost. You can also purchase your own water activity or pH meter to test your product.

How much does it cost to get my product tested?

Testing costs may vary depending on where you get your product tested. Water activity and pH testing can be done through the Alaska DEC Environmental Laboratory Services or the Kodiak Seafood and Marine Science Center. All locations charge the same: a pH test is \$20 and water activity is \$10 per sample.

Do I need to provide DEC with a copy of my test results?

No, you just need to keep a copy with you so you can demonstrate that the product is safe.

I want to sell my product at this week's farmers market. There isn't time to get my product tested. Does that mean I can't sell?

You need to have proof, if asked, that the product you are selling is safe. Until you have that documentation your product is not considered safe.

COTTAGE FOOD SALES Q & A

Food sold under the Alaska Food Code exemption 18 AAC 31.012(a).

Where can I sell my finished product?

The intention of the cottage food regulation is for the producer (the person making the product) to sell his or her product directly to the ultimate consumer. This means that the person who is purchasing the food from you is using that food for personal use and does not intend to resell it (to the best of your knowledge).

Products produced under the Cottage Food Exemption may be sold at farmers markets, fairs, bazaars and other venues where the product is sold directly to the consumer.

Is there a limit to the amount I can sell?

The maximum gross sales from your exempt products cannot exceed \$25,000 in a calendar year.

Can I sell my product over the Internet?

No. You can advertise over the internet but the sales of your product must be direct in person to the consumer.

Do I have to label my product?

There are specific labeling requirements associated with cottage foods. Foods sold under this exemption must have the statement "THESE PRODUCTS ARE NOT SUBJECT TO STATE INSPECTION." The statement must be displayed on a card, placard or sign that is con-

spicuously displayed on each food product that is packaged. An example of a placard can be found on the DEC website.

Can I sell my product in a retail food store (such as a convenience store), espresso stand or temporary food booth?

No. All food that is in a permitted food establishment (like an espresso stand or retail food facility) must come from an approved source. Because products that are produced under this exemption are not produced in a licensed and inspected facility, they are not considered an approved source and may not be sold in permitted food establishments.

I have a temporary food permit and will be selling at a local event. Can I use my cottage food in the products that I am selling in my temporary food booth?

No. All products that are sold in permitted food establishments (including temporary food booths) must use ingredients and products that come from an approved source. Because products that are produced under this exemption are not produced in a licensed and inspected facility, they are not considered an approved source. If you would like to sell items under the Cottage Food Exemptions at the same booth that has temporary food permit, the product must be clearly separated and properly labeled.



This publication is a collaborative effort between the University of Alaska Fairbanks Cooperative Extension Service and the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation.

www.uaf.edu/ces or 1-877-520-5211

Sarah R-P. Lewis, Extension Faculty, Health, Home and Family Development. This publication was originally prepared by Kate Idzorek, former Extension Food Research Technician, and Lorinda Lhotka and Morgan Poloni, Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation.



Published by the University of Alaska Fairbanks Cooperative Extension Service in cooperation with the United States Department of Agriculture. The University of Alaska is an AA/EO employer and educational institution and prohibits illegal discrimination against any individual: www.alaska.edu/nondiscrimination.

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02-14/KI-LL-MP/06-22

Reviewed June 2022