

## Guidelines for Serving Samples at the Farmers Market

Lavonne Meyer | SDSU Extension Food Safety Field Specialist  
Dustin Larsen | SD Department of Health, Office of Health Protection

One way to increase sales at the farmers market is to offer samples. Vendors need to plan ahead to make sure they are in compliance with sampling regulations. Although each farmers market can decide whether or not they allow sampling, vendors must follow the South Dakota Department of Health safe food handling requirements. It is critical to follow these guidelines to keep the food samples free of contamination.

The following is a list of minimum requirements that should be followed when providing food samples at a farmers market, roadside stand or similar events.

- Food samples must be cut or prepared on site or in a licensed kitchen. Use clean and sanitized knives, utensils and cutting boards for cutting produce. You might find it easier to bring several clean knives, utensils and cutting boards in a protective plastic container. As they are used, replace them every two hours with a clean one. Store soiled items in a closed bag or container and take them home with you at the end of the day for cleaning and sanitizing. Cutting boards that are made of thin pliable plastic that take up very little room may work well for preparing samples on site.
- Food must be in good, sound condition, free from spoilage, filth or other contamination. Food must be honestly presented and safe for human consumption. Before cutting or consuming, all fruits and vegetables must be rinsed thoroughly in clean water. If it is a thick-skinned produce, scrub with a clean vegetable brush.
- Start with small amounts of cut fruit or vegetables. Discard food after two hours, or sooner if it starts to discolor. Use good judgment regarding the eye appeal of food samples. Timing and amount of samples available work together. The amount of samples available for customers should be reflective of the time of day the market is the busiest.
- Once fresh produce is cut, it must be temperature controlled for safety. All fresh produce samples must be held at or below 41°F. Cut produce should be discarded after two hours.
- Home processed acid foods (i.e. jams, jellies, syrups) and acidified foods (pickles, relishes, sauerkraut, salsa, barbeque sauce, tomatoes) can be offered for samples. **THEY MUST BE VERIFIED FOR SAFE PROCESSING ACCORDING TO SDCL 34-18-36** (also referred to as the Home Processed Food Law).
- Hot foods such as teas or coffees available for sampling must be held at 140°F or above. Potentially hazardous foods that must be kept hot for safety cannot be made available for sampling unless they are from a licensed kitchen – including on-site temporary or mobile.
- Prevent the risk of contamination of samples by customers, employees, dust, insects, etc. by using the following safe food handling practices:
  - o Hand washing is available. (Refer to hand washing information below)
  - o All fruits and vegetables are washed clean of dirt with potable water before cutting/slicing.
  - o All foods are kept covered.
  - o Dispensing of food products must be through

the use of clean, sanitized utensils, deli sheets, or single-use gloves covering clean hands. If using gloves to handle ready-to-eat-foods, use them correctly. Refer to the SDSU Extension Publication Guidelines for Using Disposable Gloves in Temporary Food Stands by searching on the iGrow Food Safety website at <http://igrow.org/healthy-families/food-safety/>.

- o Sneeze guards and/or plastic coverings are required to protect open food products from contamination such as insects, dirt and customers. The sneeze guards must be big enough to intercept fluids and contaminants from the public. If two different samples are being offered, they should be in separate containers to prevent cross contamination, particularly by allergens.
- Individual single-use containers or pre-portioned bite-sized foods must be used. Examples are paper plates, cups, napkins, plastic utensils or toothpicks. The customer can then dispose of single service items once the produce is consumed. Provide a wastebasket for trash.
- Examples of how to provide samples of specific food items:
  - o Nuts or grapes: use a modified shaker bottle that shakes out a limited number of items
  - o Jams, pickled foods, popcorn: use small plastic sampling cups filled by the vendor for individual distribution
  - o Honey: use a capped squeeze bottle, or the vendor can use a single use spoon to scoop samples from a covered container that opens towards the vendor.
  - o Bite size pieces of produce or baked items: use individual toothpicks, so that customers can pick up one sample without touching the others.

Foods NOT allowed for sampling include those that must be temperature controlled for safety (with the exception of fresh cut produce). Examples of temperature-controlled foods that cannot be offered as a sample include all dairy products, prepared meat and poultry products and cooked vegetable products (i.e. prepared potatoes).

Adapted from the SD Department of Health Sampling Guidelines.