

Food Sampling **Guidelines and Procedures**

Farmers' markets sell primarily on taste. Allowing a customer to try a new product prior to buying can be a tremendous marketing tool for producers. Care should always be taken to ensure each sample is of the highest quality and will be a positive experience for the consumer.

Adherence to food safety principles is of great importance when offering samples. Foodborne illness resulting from improper sampling methods could create a negative image of the producer or the farmers' market in general.

It's important to note that the vendor offering samples assumes all liability and should look carefully at every step to make sure their samples are as safe as possible.

A sample is defined by the Department for Public Health 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.* There are two broad categories of samples allowed: those that are cooked or processed, and those that are raw or unprocessed.

Cooked or Processed Sampling Certificate

In order for processed and cooked products to be sampled at the farmers market, a producer must:

- ✓ read through the sampling chapters in the Farmers' Market Manual
- ✓ complete the KDA Farmers' Market Sampling Application
- ✓ submit completed application to the KDA office

No formal classroom training is required. Once the Application has been reviewed and approved, the sampling certificate will be issued. This certificate must be on display at the markets when samples are being offered.

All Samples Certificate

If the producer wishes to offer samples of raw or uncooked products they must complete the Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) Training class and the KDA Farmers' Market Sampling Application. The University of Kentucky County Extension Agents will be utilized as the instructors for the GAP Training classes. The instructors will be responsible for submitting a list of class participants' full names and mailing addresses after the class has been completed. This should be sent to the KDA office immediately following the class. Once the required GAP training has been completed and the Sampling Application has been reviewed and approved, the All Samples Certificate will be issued by the KDA office. This certificate must be on display at the markets when samples are being offered.

Here are a few points about both types of sampling certificates:

- Sampling Certificates are valid for a two year period; this coincides with updating of the KDA Farmers' Market Manual.
- The sampling certificates will only be issued for an individual. This means the person listed on the certificate will be the only person to offer samples. Employees, family members, etc. must complete their own Sampling Application and receive their own certificate if they intend to offer samples at the market.
- GAP Diplomas, however, are not required of employees, family members etc. so long as the farm operation has at least one GAP diploma on record. When sending in the Sampling Application for an All Samples Certificate (raw and uncooked products) you must write the name of the person whose GAP Diploma you will be sampling under.
- If a producer moves or expands to another market they **MUST** contact KDA so the new changes are on file and a new sampling certificate can be issued. The sampling certificate must have the names of all the markets where samples will be offered.

Preparation of Samples

Some farmers choose to prepare their samples at home where the quality of water, cleanliness of surfaces and equipment and cleanliness of vegetables can be easily controlled. The samples may be washed, cut up and placed in disposable, individual cups with lids. These cups are available at any restaurant supply store or at large outlet stores.

Whether you prepare your samples at the market or at home you must provide equipment and maintain practices that ensure the following during sample preparation:

Potable water

All water that touches your product or your utensils MUST be potable. If the water is from a well, cistern, or other non-municipal source it must then be tested and the records retained. Documented test results prove the water is potable, not previous use as drinking water.

Clean produce

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. For example, you cannot wash your tomatoes in a bucket of clean water.

Produce with rinds pose a special problem. Cantaloupes and muskmelons need a good scrubbing to remove all dirt. 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 then store them separately from unwashed items until you arrive at the market.

Approved Ingredients

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 the Home-based Processing/Microprocessing program.

Clean hands

You must wash your hands properly before touching any part of your samples. Hand sanitizers do not substitute for proper hand washing. Gloves do not substitute for proper hand washing. Always wash your hands before putting on gloves and after taking them off. If gloves become torn, ripped or contaminated they should be changed. Never reuse gloves.

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

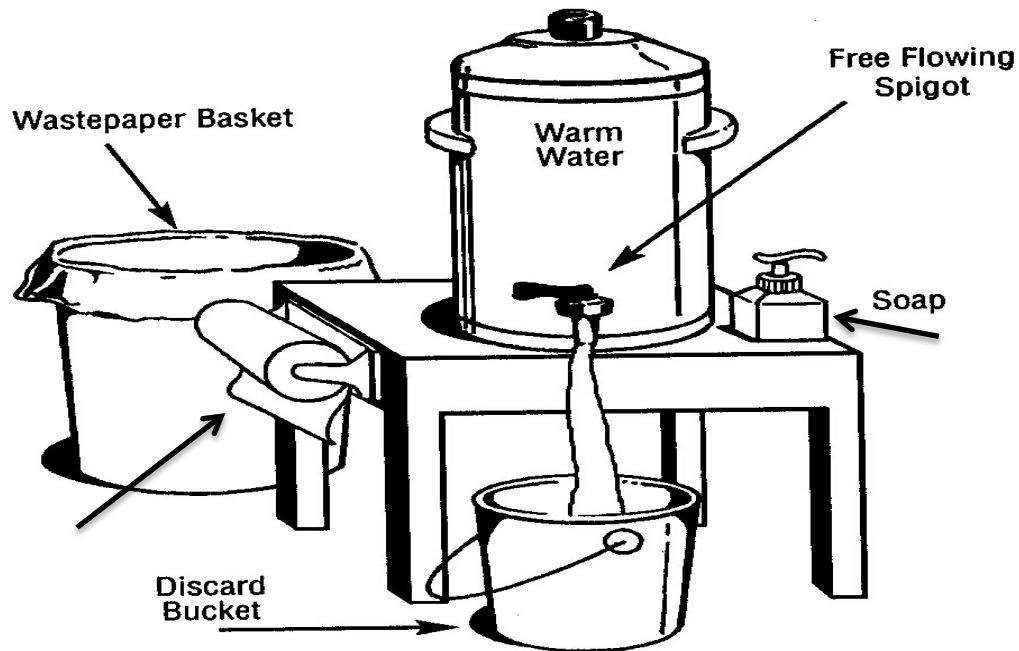
- Wetting your hands
- Applying liquid soap
- Briskly rubbing your hands together – including fingernails and backs of hands for a minimum of 20 seconds (a long time!)
- Rinsing your hands under free flowing water
- Drying your hands with a disposable paper towel

When should you wash your hands?

- After using the bathroom
- After handling money, unwashed produce, baskets, and anything not clean and sanitized
- Any time you leave your stand and return

A proper hand washing station includes:

- A container of potable water large enough to supply water for the entire sampling time. This container must have a free-flowing dispensing valve. This is the type of spigot that does not require you to hold open the valve to keep the water flowing.
- The container should be raised off the ground to allow a catch basin under the spigot.
- Paper towels
- Liquid hand washing soap in a pump or squeeze bottle.



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.

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 30 seconds in a sanitizing solution**. If more than one or two different utensils are used, a cleaning, rinsing and sanitizing station is required. A simple, but effective sanitizing solution is 50 ppm household bleach/water solution. This is about one capful of bleach to one gallon of water. Sanitizer test strips are needed to check the sanitizer strength. The sanitizing container should be of sufficient size to completely immerse the largest utensil in use.

Proper temperature

If you bring cold products to the market for sampling, you must maintain them at 41°F or below. That means you should probably ice them above and below. When using ice to maintain proper temperature, you will need to make provisions for melted ice to drain away from the product. A small cooler can provide a great way to keep samples cool. A thermometer is recommended to make sure cold products are being stored at the proper temperatures.

Any product you warm at the market must be heated and kept above 135°F. You must have a way to maintain this temperature. A quality food 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 be perfect little bites of your product at its best!

If you are preparing your samples at the market

- 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.
- If using a knife then you must also have a proper cutting board. It must be handled like any other utensil – washed, rinsed, 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. These utensil sets must be kept separated from each other at all times to prevent cross-contamination.
- 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 separated from each other and completely set up before preparing any samples.

Delivery of Samples

- You must deliver the samples to the customers in such a way to prevent anyone from touching any other sample. If you have prepared the samples at home, you can place the individual cups on a tray a few at a time. Then, there is no need to worry about any customer touching any samples other than their own.
- You must protect the samples from the elements and insects. Cover your samples with insect proof netting or plastic wrap (or lids if you use the individual cups).
- 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.
- All food shall be stored at least 6 inches off the ground.

Additional Information and Best Practices for Sampling at Farmers' Markets Study by the University of Kentucky College of Agriculture

The 2011 Regional Farm Market Sampling study consisted of 3,406 responses from farmers' market patrons across eight states and had previous food sampling experience. Responses indicated that vendor friendliness, sample presentation, market atmosphere, sampling with friends or family and interaction with the vendor significantly impacted how the patrons felt about the sampling event. They concluded that the impact derived from sampling experiences extends to future purchases and referrals, and many vendors might find that going through the certification process is worth it, because it means increasing their customer base, and in turn, their revenues.

This practical guide provides farmers' market vendors with best practices and ideas of how to sample their own products. Advice and extra resources helpful throughout the sampling process are also included.

For a copy of the Best Practices for Sampling at Farmers' Market visit their website at <http://www.ca.uky.edu/cmsspubsclass/files/extensionpubs/2012-19.pdf>. You may also find a Checklist for Best Practices in Sampling at the end of this manual.