

# BEST PRACTICES FOR PREPARING PRODUCT SAMPLES FOR CONSUMERS



Gary W. Black  
Commissioner

Product samples offered at retail are not considered to be food sales, and are therefore not subject to the licensing requirements of the Georgia Department of Agriculture. In the interest of public health, this document has been developed to provide guidance on the proper handling and preparation of food samples offered in conjunction with food sales operations. For further assistance, contact the Food Safety Division at 404-656-3627.

## **EMPLOYEES:**

While preparing food, employees should not wear jewelry on their arms and hands. This does not apply to a plain ring such as a wedding band. This will reduce the likelihood of tearing disposable gloves, or providing harborage for debris which can be transmitted to food contact surfaces.

Employees should wear clean outer clothing. Aprons should be used when preparing raw animal foods, and removed before beginning a new task to limit the possibility of cross-contamination. When moving from a raw food operation to a ready-to-eat food operation, it is strongly encouraged for employees to wash their hands and monitor their clothing for food particles and debris that may lead to cross-contamination.

Employees should only eat, drink, or use any form of tobacco in designated areas where the contamination of exposed food, clean equipment, utensils, unwrapped single-service and single-use articles; or other items needing protection cannot result.

Employees, while engaging in food preparation, should wear hair restraints; such as hats, hair coverings, nets, beard restraints and clothing that covers body hair; that are designed and worn effectively to preclude the contamination by hair; of exposed food, clean equipment, utensils, and unwrapped single-service and single-use articles.

Employees experiencing persistent sneezing, coughing, or a runny nose that causes discharges from the eyes, nose, or mouth, should not work with exposed food, clean equipment, utensils, or unwrapped single-service or single-use articles.

An employee should not use a utensil more than once to taste food during its preparation.

Although it is the responsibility of the consumer to inquire about food allergens, employees should be knowledgeable of their products' ingredients so that they may provide allergen information upon a consumer's request.

## **HANDWASHING:**

Handwashing has been identified as one of the most critical aspects of preventing foodborne illnesses. Since handwash facilities are not typically readily available at events, handwashing should be performed before beginning food preparation activities, after using the restroom, and between switching from raw to ready-to-eat foods.

## **BARE HAND CONTACT WITH READY-TO-EAT FOODS:**

Bare hand contact with ready-to-eat foods should be avoided at all costs. Employees should use suitable utensils such as deli tissue, spatulas, tongs, or single-use gloves.

Spatulas, tongs and other utensils should be dedicated to raw or ready-to-eat food operations, and should never be switched intermittently between raw and ready-to-eat foods.

Single-use gloves should be used for only one task, such as working with ready-to-eat or raw animal food. Gloves should be donned before beginning a food preparation task, and changed whenever switching to a new food preparation task.

Gloves should be discarded when torn, or at any time that they may have been rendered contaminated (coughing, sneezing, scratching, touching hair or other areas of the body).

## **PROTECTION FROM CONTAMINATION:**

Food, ingredients, equipment, utensils and other food contact surfaces should not be stored on the ground.

Open foods should be covered when not actively used to prevent their contamination.

Product samples set out for consumer self-service should be covered to prevent possible contamination from consumers, and should be provided with suitable utensils or effective dispensing methods that protect the food from contamination. Tongs or individual tissues may also be used.

Cleaning chemicals or other toxic substances should be clearly labeled, safe to use in a food environment, and stored in a manner that prevents them from contaminating food and food contact surfaces.

Raw and ready-to-eat foods should be separated at all times. Ready-to-eat foods should never come into contact with raw foods, equipment, utensils or other contact surfaces that have been previously utilized for the preparation of raw foods.

Ice used for cooling the exterior surfaces of food should not be reused in food or beverages. Packaged food should not be stored in direct contact with ice or water if the food is subject to the entry of water because of the nature of its packaging, wrapping or container, or its positioning in the ice or water.

### **EQUIPMENT AND UTENSILS:**

All equipment and utensils, if not designed to be single-service or single-use, should be adequately cleanable and in good repair. The equipment and utensils should be made of nontoxic materials.

### **TIME OR TEMPERATURE CONTROL FOR FOOD SAFETY:**

A probe-style thermometer should be used to verify temperatures for cooking, reheating, and cold holding. The thermometer should be calibrated using an ice-water slurry, and recalibrated if dropped or at any other time that the accuracy is in question. The probe should be sanitized to prevent cross contamination.

### **COOKING**

Raw animal foods should be cooked to the following temperatures:

1. 145°F or above for 15 seconds for raw **shell eggs** broken and prepared for immediate service, and **fish, meat, and pork**; including **game animals** commercially raised for food.
2. 155°F for 15 seconds for **ratites** and **injected meats**; and **fish, meat, game animals** commercially raised for food that have been **comminuted** (chopped, flaked, ground, or minced); and raw **shell eggs** not intended for immediate consumption.
3. 165°F or above for 15 seconds for **poultry, stuffed fish, stuffed meat, stuffed pasta, stuffed poultry, or stuffing** containing fish, meat, or poultry.

### **REHEATING**

Ready-to-eat food from a commercially processed, hermetically sealed container, or from an intact package from a food processing plant should be heated to a temperature of at least 135°F for hot holding.

Food reheated in a microwave oven shall be covered; rotated or stirred throughout or midway during cooking or according to label instructions during heating; heated to a temperature of at least 165°F; and allowed to stand covered 2 minutes after reheating.

### **COLD HOLDING**

Refrigerated products must be kept at 41°F or below. Frozen products should remain frozen hard to the touch. If ice is used for cold holding, the ice level should be frequently monitored and replenished to ensure effective cold holding.

### **HOT HOLDING**

Products held in a chaffing dish, crock pot, or similar vessel designed for hot holding should keep food at a minimum of 135°F. If the equipment is unable to maintain that product temperature, then time must be used as the food safety control.

### **TIME**

If time, rather than temperature, is used as the food safety control:

1. Hot holding foods, originally cooked or reheated to their proper temperatures, should be discarded after 4 hours.
2. Foods that were prepared from ambient, or room temperature ingredients, should be discarded after 2 hours.

A Holding Log should be utilized to verify that products are consumed or discarded within the appropriate time frames. The log should capture the product description; the time that product was finished cooking/reheating or processed at ambient temperature; and the time that product was totally consumed, or the time that any remainder of that product was discarded (not to exceed the 2 or 4 hour window as described above).

### **CLEANING:**

Food contact surfaces of equipment and utensils should be cleaned at least every 4 hours. If there are not facilities provided for washing, rinsing, and sanitizing; it is strongly recommended to bring several sets of tongs, cutting boards, and other equipment that can be switched out at least every 4 hours (or sooner if needed) to reduce the likelihood of contamination. Have a container clearly marked to store soiled equipment or utensils to prevent their further use without cleaning.

Raw fruits and vegetables should be thoroughly washed in water to remove soil and other contaminants before being cut, combined with other ingredients, cooked, served, or offered for human consumption in ready-to-eat form.

Rags, if used, should be stored in a sanitizer solution. Rags and the sanitizer solution should be changed at least every 4 hours, or more frequently if used consistently, to prevent contamination of food contact surfaces.