

Responsible Procurement

and Receiving of Local Food

Locally-sourced food has been the rage and the goal for many organizations, with a tremendous spike in popularity over the past 15 years. As foodservice operators, we find ourselves deep in the chasms of local procurement and striving to increase our viability in an ever-demanding market. We may be asking, how do we address our customer's desire for—and perception of—responsible procurement and sustainability while doing so in a safe manner? Let's start with the first step in this process: provider selection.

SELECTING A PROVIDER

Selecting our providers is the prologue to our entire foodservice operation story, or our “flow of food.” Choosing the provider best able to deliver a steady supply of needed product to sustain our business, yet also meet safety requirements for customer health, is imperative. The steps we should take in this process are simple and, when used and executed, can provide safe procurement to protect our organizations as well as our clientele. Consider these questions.

Is this supplier certified, verified, or inspected by a regulatory agency or a third-party auditing agency?

Suppliers to commercial operations are often required to have certain regulatory inspections or auditing completed to produce and provide specific items to commercial customers. If you are purchasing meat, poultry, and/or eggs, these suppliers must be approved and inspected by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). If you are purchasing any other manufactured



Shawn Kohlhaas is the Principal Partner with Culinary Cultivations. He is the current President of the Greater Grand Rapids American Culinary Federation. He also serves as a member of the Kent County Health Department Food Safety Advisory Board, and is a board member for the Great Lakes Conference for Food Protection. In addition, he hosts a radio show called The Local Feed. Visit www.culinarycultivations.org

food items, the suppliers need to be inspected by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

If a regulatory agency is not required, what standard operating procedures and inspections does the supplier participate in or follow to ensure the safety of your food?

Many producers and growers are not regulated by any authority, including local produce growers. It's a good idea to question whether they have Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) certification. This is a USDA audit program that proves to purchasers like us that the grower is practicing all of the needed safety protocols to provide us with food that is safe.

What other measures is the proposed supplier taking to ensure food safety?

Ask the questions below to help you assess what your potential supplier does to promote food safety.

- *Can I see your food safety history documentation?*

Knowing a potential supplier's food safety track record with compliance can provide you with good insight into not only their food safety practices, but also their business ethos.

- *What type of food safety controls do you use in your flow of food?*

Ensuring that a potential supplier not only has good safety controls in place, but they are also in use, is important. Get specific with your inquiry, asking for examples and actual tools and systems implemented that safeguard your food.

- *Do you use third-party audit certifications?*

Find out who did the certifications and audits and when they were done. Also determine whether the scope of certification matches the product that they are supplying to you.

- *How do you monitor time and temperature in your flow of food?*

Learn about the tools and systems they use at each stage in the flow of food. Purchasing,

storage, loading, and delivery should all be points in the flow of food that must be considered.

- *How do you ensure that the food you deliver to me is safe?*

Determine all the safety precautions that your supplier takes to confirm you receive safe foods.

LOOKING CLOSELY AT THE FLOW OF FOOD

Once we have found a viable and reliable food source, the next step in our process is to ensure that the provider's storage and delivery procedures are intact and safe. In delivery and distribution, it's important to control time and temperature on all of your TCS (Time/Temperature Control for Safety) foods. TCS foods must be maintained in a safe and controlled environment to assure that the food we produce for our customers is wholesome and protected.

Here are the points to focus on when looking at the flow of food for a supplier.

Warehousing Controls

All foods that are housed in a controlled environment must be constantly monitored to ensure the food does not fall prey to time/temperature abuse. This can be regulated by many methods, but foremost is constant observation and record-keeping of temperature control of all products. Pest control in the warehouse is also important.

Loading Controls

Taking care in the handling of food from storage to loading is critical to guarantee the safety of our food. Opportunities for time/temperature abuse are abundant. Ensure that all food is transferred from the warehousing storage to the transportation vehicle in one solid flow so as to not allow TCS foods to linger in non-temperature control areas.

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Shipping Controls

Foods in the process of transportation should be monitored at all times. Different types of controls are used, such as time-temperature indicators (TTIs) that are attached to packages by the supplier to monitor both time and temperature. A color change appears on the device when abuse has occurred. Also, constant electronic monitoring of temperature control via TTIs is used through satellite electronic transfer of information to get up-to-the-second time and temperature reports.

The last step in this process requires that we do our due diligence. Now that we have secured a safe supplier of our products, we need to be sure we continue the safe passage of that food into our operation.

Receiving Controls

There are many ways to apply receiving controls in your foodservice operation, but the best practice is to always receive deliveries during non-peak business hours. Arrange deliveries so they arrive when staff has enough time to perform proper

inspections and products can be correctly received. To ensure inspections are smooth and safe, make sure enough specific trained staff are responsible for receiving. Give employees the necessary tools—such as thermometers and delivery logs—and require that they inspect deliveries immediately upon receipt.

Lastly, continue to monitor the product while in your storage for time, temperature, pests, and any other factors that impact food safety. If you ever have questions, refer to the Standard Operating Procedures for Food Safety that are specific to your operation.

SUMMING IT UP

Doing your part to be a safe, local, and sustainable partner to our industry is not only important, but is imperative to ensure the success of your operation and the health of your patrons. **E**

Visit our food safety resources page, which can provide you with tools and systems for your operation: culinarycultivations.org/resources.



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