

# Food Safety Guidance for Farmers' Market Traders

May 2008



## **HOW THIS LEAFLET WILL HELP YOU**

This leaflet will explain how to meet the food safety laws that apply to you while trading at a farmers' market. It covers the basic areas that apply to typical farmers' market stalls. To make it readable and straightforward to understand, it is not a detailed guide but you should find information here about how to obtain further advice on some of the more complicated food safety issues.

Farmers' markets are the subject of routine checking by food safety officers from your local Environmental Health and Trading Standards Department, who may visit you on the day a market is held. In addition, the farm or other premises from which you operate may also be subject to inspection.



## 1. The rules of hygiene - Controlling hazards

The law requires you to identify possible hazards to food safety, know which of these is actually important for the type of food that you prepare or sell and to provide suitable controls to stop problems occurring. While this can be complicated for some businesses, simple measures are all that is required for most traders at a farmers' market. The most important of these are described below.

### i. Transportation

- Food transported to a market must be wrapped, covered or placed in suitable containers to prevent contamination. Vehicles and containers should be kept clean and in good repair and the food should be kept

separate from other items. For example, if you are accustomed to transporting farm dogs, game birds or containers of agricultural diesel in the back of your LandRover, you should think about how you can avoid tainting or direct contamination of fruit and vegetables.

- Simple cardboard boxes and paper-lined crates are fine for most agricultural produce but you will need higher grade materials, such as metal or plastic crates, for bakery products and meats.
- Some foods must be kept cold (below 5 oC) to prevent the growth of dangerous bacteria. These include soft or semi-hard

cheeses, most other dairy products, cooked meat and vegetable products, most smoked or cured meat and fish and shellfish. Insulated containers with icepacks and a thermometer are usually sufficient and the temperature must be checked from time to time (and preferably written down in a log book). Larger volume traders should consider using refrigerated vehicles.

### ii. Preparation

- The surface that you lay out or prepare food on must be smooth and impervious so that it can be thoroughly cleaned. If you are using wooden tables, you must provide plastic sheeting or other suitable covering material.

- You will need to wash and dry your hands from time to time and if facilities are not provided on site, you must bring your own. For stallholders selling open foods, such as meats, or high risk unwrapped foods such as cooked meats, dairy products and seafoods, there must be handwashing facilities at the stall. These should include a supply of hot water, towels, bowl, soap and preferably a nailbrush. For hot water, insulated flasks should be sufficient in most cases.

- If you are using knives or other serving implements you will need washing facilities for these, which must not be the same as those used for handwashing - separate bowls or sinks must be used.

- Wear clean protective overclothing while handling unwrapped food.

### iii. Display and Service

- To avoid possible contamination, food must

not be placed directly onto the floor. It is best to keep all unwrapped food off the ground by at least 45cm.

- Make sure that high risk and low risk foods are well separated- for example, keep raw foods away from cooked foods. The high risk foods described in ii above should be protected from the public touching, coughing or sneezing in the display area.

- Check the temperature of chilled foods from time to time and preferably keep a record of this in a logbook. Make sure you know the correct temperature for the food that you are selling.

- Regularly wipe down surfaces with a clean (preferably disposable) cloth using a food grade cleaner/disinfectant.

- If the market does not have refuse services, make sure you have sacks or containers for waste food and water.

### iv. Training and basic

### hygiene measures

It is not obligatory in law for all market traders to have attended courses on training in food hygiene but you must at least be aware of the basic principles that apply to the safe handling and preparation of food. However, if you have no experience of running a retail food stall or business, or if you are manufacturing food at home or from other premises, you will need some specific training. In any case, food hygiene training courses are always strongly recommended for anyone involved in the running of a food business.

Indeed, you may find that your local market will require evidence of such training before allowing you to join. If you are in any doubt as to what is required, your local Environmental Health Department will be happy to advise you.

For basic retailing operations, such as for selling fruit and



vegetables, or for bakery products that do not contain meat or cream, the following advice should be of help.

- Keep yourself clean and wear protective clothing.
- Always wash your hands thoroughly before handling food, after using the toilet, handling raw food or waste and after every break.
- If you have a skin, nose or throat problem or an infected wound, do not handle unwrapped food.
- If you have a stomach upset, do not handle food for at least 48hrs after you are free of symptoms
- Ensure that cuts, spots or sores are covered with a brightly coloured waterproof plaster.

- Do not smoke, eat or drink where open food is handled.

- Clean as you go - keep all equipment and surfaces clean and disinfected.
- Avoid unnecessary handling of food.

## **2. Do I need to be registered?**

Registration involves contacting your local authority for a form which you fill in and return. There is no fee and no 'food test' to pass. For market stalls, you do not need to register each market site, only the premises where you normally keep the stall and its materials overnight. In most cases, this will be your farm or smallholding. Contact

your local Environmental Health Department for advice if you are in any doubt. Bear in mind that whether or not you need to register, your premises will still be subject to inspection for food safety purposes.

## **3. Labelling, weights and measures**

This is an area that is largely enforced by Trading Standards Officers, except for Use-By dates where Environmental Health staff have powers as well. It can be a very complex subject and if in any doubt about anything described below, contact Trading Standards at West Sussex County Council 08454-040506.

#### **4. Manufacturing food at home for sale from your market stall**

This is an area that covers everything from jams and cakes to frozen and chilled meals and meat products. Special rules and regulations can apply to some of these foods, particularly when making meat, fish and dairy products, which will include pre-packed meals and dishes. If you do not comply with these rules, the consequences can be very serious. It cannot be stressed enough that when thinking about starting such a business you must get advice from your local Environmental Health Department. Here is some brief guidance :

i. Making low risk items such as cakes and jams

Generally these present few problems and many people safely produce a range of jams and non-dairy cakes from home. You must make sure you know about the basics of food hygiene and law and also the labelling and

shelf-life requirements that apply. Before starting out, contact your local Environmental and Trading Standards department for advice.

ii. Making high risk items such as meat, dairy and fish products

These foods are much higher risk because they support the growth of harmful bacteria and are often sold ready to eat without further cooking. A mistake in their preparation and handling can have serious consequences for public health. As a result, many of these products, which include hams, pates, ice-cream, cheeses, yoghurts and prepared foods such as meat pies, lasagne, shepherds pies etc. require approval of the production premises and process under specific legislation. It can be very difficult, and sometimes impossible, to obtain approval for a domestic premises to manufacture these kind of products, even on a small scale. As a result, you will need

to plan your operation carefully.

In addition, attractive traditional recipes, which may be perfectly safe for immediate consumption, do not always lend themselves to a production process, packaging or an easily assessable shelf life for prolonged storage.

Before starting out, contact your local Environmental and Trading Standards department for advice.

#### **5. Giving away free samples**

You will want to introduce your customers to as wide a range of your foods as possible and having tasting samples available is a good way to get their attention. Bear in mind that even though you may give samples away free of charge, the law sees this transaction as a sale, and their production and handling is still subject to legal control. Samples need to be protected from contamination



such as undue handling, usually either from inquisitive pets or equally inquisitive children, so ensure samples are stored high up. If your customers have to handle your food, try and make sure they don't touch other samples on the plate - cocktail sticks or tongs help to stop this. Most importantly, don't leave food that must be chilled for safety reasons out of chill control for long periods, so keep quantities to a minimum and throw out uneaten food if it has been out of refrigeration for a long time. The law permits a maximum of four hours in most cases but it is best if high risk food is disposed of after one hour out of chill control. Bear in mind that for some foods, such as hard cheeses, temperature control is not critical to safety and longer periods are acceptable, so seek advice if in any doubt.

You may find your local market has its own conditions about food

samples and they may not be permitted. This is at the discretion of the market organiser rather than any national legal requirement.

We hope this leaflet is of help to you. If you require any further information, please contact your local authority :

### **Environmental Health**

Crawley Borough Council  
Environmental Health  
Department  
Town Hall  
The Boulevard  
Crawley, RH10 1UZ  
Tel : 01293 438000

### **Trading Standards**

Trading Standards  
West Sussex County  
Council  
Centenary House  
Woodfield Road  
Crawley, RH10 8GQ  
Tel : 08454-040506

Useful contacts:

The National Association of Farmers' Markets  
Telephone: 01225 787914 web: [www.farmersmarkets.net](http://www.farmersmarkets.net)

Farm Retail Association  
Telephone: 023 8036 2150 web: [www.farmshopping.com](http://www.farmshopping.com)

National Farmers Union  
Telephone: 0207 331 7200 web: [www.nfu.org.uk](http://www.nfu.org.uk)

The Countryside Agency  
Telephone: 01242 521381 web: [www.countryside.gov.uk](http://www.countryside.gov.uk)

The Food Standards Agency  
Telephone: (helpline) 020 7276 8000 web: [www.food.gov.uk](http://www.food.gov.uk)

The Country Land and Business Association  
Telephone: 020 7235 0511 web: [www.cla.org.uk](http://www.cla.org.uk)

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