

From the field to the table:

Addendum 13, our experience with cooking demonstrations and samples

For many markets, cooking demonstrations performed by restaurant chefs are a cause for both celebration and concern. Chefs are wonderful spokespersons for local produce and healthy food handling. They draw big crowds; however, they also draw the attention of local health department officials. For this reason, some markets have been forced to eliminate chefs' performances as featured events.

The enclosed food handling guidelines are designed to eliminate the need for the required components of a commercial food establishment — triple sinks and so forth — by removing the need to wash any containers or utensils on site. The logic is this: market vendors are not required to have triple sinks and wipe-down surfaces at the market because they do not cut portions on site. This contradicts the practice of chefs and vendors who give samples on site. If local health departments recognize these contradictions, we suggest the following:

Chefs' cooking demonstrations: Health departments usually have a good relationship with restaurant chefs, including confidence in their food handling practices. Chefs should arrive with most of their food prepared in their approved kitchen, finish up preparations on site, and then serve samples to shoppers in plastic serving dishes with plastic utensils. Any dirty pots and pans will be packed up and returned to their restaurant kitchens for cleaning. **Utilize the chefs' / health department's relationship as an advantage.** If the health department is not convinced that the chef is prepared to cook and hand out samples safely, the health department should conduct a specific training to chefs for market appearances.

Vendors' samples at the market: In providing samples, vendors should use disposable utensils and dishes. We suggest training vendors to use plastic utensils that can be thrown away after use, wear plastic gloves, prepare

samples as much as possible prior to leaving the production facility (e.g., cutting up bread samples and placing in plastic sample cups prior to coming to market).

Cooking demonstrations and samples can pose health concerns. Health department officials may become upset with the practice of on site samples (by chefs or vendors) and may use it as a means of challenging the very existence of a market. Farmers' markets do not fit into the existing paradigm of supermarkets where everything is "sealed for your protection." The best method to put health officials at ease is to develop pro-active, comprehensive food handling guidelines.