

# Purchasing Food

## Focus on Sanitation and Quality Standards

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**For a foodservice operation,** purchasing is the first step in the flow of food. Food and water must be purchased from approved sources. An approved source is one that is inspected based on federal, state, or local laws and has appropriate HACCP procedures in place.

Purchasing specifications should include:

- Quality standards, such as grading and HACCP verification
- Wholesomeness indicators, such as inspection.

In addition, delivery times and intervals can also be included in specifications. The manager must exercise careful planning when purchasing food. Purchasing excessive quantities of food can result in spoilage, higher costs, and an increased likelihood of foodborne illness. Perishable products—such as fresh produce, fresh seafood, fresh meats, eggs, and dairy products—should be purchased in a quantity that can be used within a very short time period.

Non-perishable foods—such as canned and frozen foods—can be purchased in quantities that allow for longer storage times.

### INSPECTION

All food shipped in interstate commerce (from one state to another) must meet the requirements of one or more federal laws. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has established uniform standards for state and federally inspected meats, poultry, and eggs. Inspection is a mandatory process that addresses wholesomeness and safety of fresh meats, dairy

products, and produce. Some products that are not shipped across state lines may have to be inspected by state programs with their own standards—some higher than those of federal programs. Foodservice operations may only purchase meat, poultry, and eggs that have been inspected by the USDA or by a state department of health or agriculture. Inspected food is considered safe for consumption, but inspection does not imply any quality standard.

Seafood and fish must be purchased from approved suppliers. This is especially important for molluscan shellfish such as oysters, scallops, mollusks, and clams, because they may be consumed raw or undercooked. To ensure safety when received, these foods must be accompanied by a certification that documents where and when they were harvested (Shellfish Identification Tags). This certification must be kept for 90 days to allow time for evidence of a Hepatitis A virus infection. Figure 1 provides the requirements for shellfish harvesters in the State of Oregon. Check your own state regulations for similar requirements.

The Public Health Service maintains lists of Certified Shellfish Shippers. Suppliers should be selected from this list or from state-approved lists.

Figure 1

### Oregon State Requirements for Shellfish Harvesters (Sample Regulation)



**Shellfish Tagging**—Harvesters and growers must attach to each container of shellfish a durable, waterproof tag sized: 2-5/8" x 5-1/4" with information in the following order:

- Harvester's certificate number (i.e., OR 777 HV)
- Harvest date
- Harvest area (bay or beach)
- Type and quantity of shellfish
- This statement: "This tag shall be attached until container is empty or retagged and kept on file for 90 days."

### GRADING

Grades are classifications of foods by a descriptive term or number to ensure the uniform quality and give an indication of the desirableness. Grading is a voluntary process. Most grades are assigned by government agencies and follow strict guidelines. Grades refer to attributes such as visual appearance, color, size, marbling, and uniformity.

Canned vegetables and fruits are usually graded, and each vendor has its own terminology. Beef, veal, pork, and lamb are graded by the USDA. For beef, the USDA grades are: prime, choice, select, standard, commercial, utility, cutter, and canner. The last three grades are not used in foodservice operations. Examples of inspection stamps and grade shields appear in Figure 2.

Figure 2

### USDA Inspection Stamps and Grade Shields



### VENDOR SELECTION

Selecting a vendor is an important part of the purchasing process. Find out if you are required to purchase exclusively with a vendor. The Certified Dietary Manager must consider the extent to which the potential vendor will be able to meet the quality, service, and cost expectations of the foodservice operation. The relationship between the manager and vendor must be one of mutual cooperation and trust. Visits to the vendor's distribution center and inspections of delivery vehicles are advisable in the process of selecting a vendor. Once a reputable vendor is found, it's important to monitor quality continuously to ensure that the vendor has a long-term commitment to providing safe, quality food. Some considerations leading to selection of a safe food vendor include:

- Is the vendor inspected by an independent source to ensure food safety?
- Can the supplier provide you with written proof of government inspection for meats?
- Does the vendor have a Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) system in place?
- Will the vendor allow the manager to set delivery times?
- Are the vendor's delivery vehicles clean and well maintained?
- Are the delivery trucks for refrigerated foods adequately refrigerated?
- If purchasing frozen foods, do delivery trucks have freezer sections?
- Can the vendor provide business references?
- Can the vendor meet the delivery needs (daily, weekly, monthly) of the facility to ensure a safe flow of food?
- Does the vendor clarify their canned fruit and vegetable grading terminology?
- Does the vendor have a reputation for providing quality products?
- Will the vendor allow staff to inspect products upon receipt?
- Is the vendor cooperative if you refuse products because of food safety concerns?
- Where is the vendor located relative to the foodservice operation? A closer vendor would reduce delivery time and may reduce the possibility of contamination or time/temperature abuse of food.

Keep your clients safe by purchasing foods that meet the strictest quality standards. 🍷

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