

Commercially Canning Acid Foods: Fruits, Jams, Jellies, Dressings, and Sauces

DEFINITION OF A COMMERCIAL FOOD PROCESSOR

An individual, group, or organization which processes or preserves a food item for sale (excluding food service preparation) is considered a Commercial Food Processor.

DEFINITION OF CANNED ACID FOODS

A pH value expresses the acidity of a food product. The FDA classifies foods that have a natural pH of 4.6 or below as "Acid Foods" [21CFR114.3(a)]. These foods include, but are not limited to, apples, apricots, peaches, pears, pineapple, tomatoes (firm-ripe), and most fruit jams, jellies, preserves, and certain juices, singly or in any combination. Also included are standardized and nonstandardized food dressings and condiment sauces that contain small amounts of low-acid food(s) and have a resultant finished equilibrium pH that does not significantly differ from that of the predominant acid or acid food [23CFR114.3(b)]. "Canned" acid foods receive a thermal process which permits the finished product to be stored, distributed, and retailed under normal nonrefrigerated conditions.

FEDERAL REGULATIONS GOVERNING COMMERCIAL CANNING OF ACID FOODS

FDA regulations governing commercially processed foods are contained in Title 21 of the *Code of Federal Regulations* (CFR). These regulations are published by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402. Parts

1 through 199 of 21CFR deal with food and food-related items. In addition, the "United States Standards for Grades" of certain processed fruits, vegetables, and products thereof, are contained in Title 7 of the CFRs, part 52 (7CFR52) and are administered by the Agricultural Marketing Service/U.S. Department of Agriculture. CFR volumes are annually updated to incorporate changes in the regulation, and subscribing public libraries usually have the most recent issues.

Individuals wishing to start a commercial food-processing business should become familiar with all applicable CFR sections. However, the sections of greatest interest to a commercial canned acid food operation are:

- Canned Fruit (standards; 21CFR145)
- Canned Fruit Juices (standards; 21CFR146)
- Current Good Manufacturing Practice in Manufacturing, Processing, Packing, or Holding Human Food (21CFR110)
- Food Dressing and Flavorings (standards; 21CFR169)
- Food Labeling (21CFR101)
- Fruit Butters, Jellies, Preserves, and Related Products (standards; 21CFR150)
- Processed Fruits and Vegetables, Processed Products Thereof, and Certain Other Processed Food Products (USDA/Agriculture Marketing Service; U.S. Standards for Grades; 7CFR52)

STATE REGULATIONS GOVERNING COMMERCIAL CANNING OF ACIDIFIED FOODS

Federal food regulations are often adopted by individual states. The regulations for compliance with the South Carolina Food and Cosmetic Act (1972) are technically equivalent to the FDA requirements published in 21CFR1-199. The SC Department of Agriculture (SCDA), Laboratory Division, Box 11280, Columbia, SC 29211, telephone (803) 737-9690, has primary responsibility for administering and enforcing the South Carolina Food and Cosmetic Act.

SELECTED FEDERAL/STATE REQUIREMENTS GOVERNING COMMERCIAL CANNING OF ACID FOODS

Many sections of the CFR food regulations contain “should” and “shall” statements. “Should” is used to state recommended or advisory procedures or to identify recommended equipment. “Shall” is used to state mandatory requirements. A brief listing of selected (but not all) key “should” and “shall” items that apply to commercial canning of acid foods include:

- **CODING:** All canned acid food containers offered for sale **should** be marked with a meaningful code permanently identifying the packing period (lot), contents, date, and processing facility.
- **FACILITIES:** A facility housing a commercial canning operation **shall** have easily cleanable and impermeable surfaces on the walls, floors, and ceiling; shatter-guarded lighting fixtures in all product areas; be void of insect/vermin accesses; and be physically laid out to separate unit operations, raw ingredients, and intermediate/finished product(s). Other considerations address sanitation requirements, controls, operations, personnel, equipment, and grounds. A “home kitchen” would *not* be expected to comply with the requirements for a facility in which to operate a commercial canning operation.
- **LABELING:** All canned acid food offered for sale **shall** be properly labeled as to identity of contents, ingredients, fill of contents, and manufacturer/

distributor information. Size of print font, label location of mandatory information, and voluntary information may vary according to shape and size of the container. Nutritional labeling is mandatory for most canned products under FDA’s jurisdiction unless the processor has filed for, and obtained, a low-volume exemption. Low-volume exemptions are available to companies that have not provided nutritional information nor made a nutrient content or health claim; average less than 100 full-time equivalent employees and have fewer than 100,000 consumer units of the specific product sold annually in the United States. (Note: Persons that are not importers with fewer than 10 full-time equivalent employees *and* fewer than 10,000 total units of the product sold annually are exempt without having to file for the low-volume exemption.)

- **GUARANTY:** All ingredients, containers, and food contact surfaces **shall** be suitable for food use and are normally purchased under written “guaranty” from the supplier [21CFR7.12].
- **RECALL PLAN:** All acid food canning operations **should** maintain an updated written “product recall” procedure plan.
- **RECORDS:** Records **should** be retained for a period of time that exceeds the shelf life of the product, except that they need not be retained more than 3 years [as required for acidified foods in 21CFR114.100(e)].

REMINDER

A commercial food processing operation is a business venture. Before beginning operation, a business should have adequate insurance coverage (especially liability insurance) and the appropriate business licenses(s). City, county, and state business-licensing information is available by calling the South Carolina Program Assistance Line (PAL) at (803) 734-2050. Another helpful guide is *Attention All Employers*, available from the Office of Public Information, SC Department of Labor, Licensing, and Regulation, P.O. Box 11329, Columbia, SC 29211, telephone (803) 734-9600. Information on incorporating a business is available from SC Sec. of State, Corporate Division, P.O. Box 11350, Columbia, SC 29211,

telephone (803) 734-2158. South Carolina business incorporation forms may be ordered by calling 1 (800) 476-1844 or 1 (800) 351-1244.

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