

Processing Jams, Jellies and Acidified Foods in the Farm Kitchen



Background:

In 2010, Connecticut passed a state law that allows Connecticut farmers to process acidified foods in their residential farm kitchens. The intent of this legislation was to allow farmers to can and pickle produce from their farm.

Key Points:

Farmers processing acidified foods in their farm kitchen **must adhere** to the following guidelines:

- Farmers must use produce grown from their own farms;
- The product label must indicate that the acidified food was not prepared in the government inspected kitchen;
- Farmers may only sell this product at their own farm stands or at certified farmers' markets;
- Processors must pH test the finished product;
- Processors must have their water tested;
- Farmers must take a class in safe food handling or safe food processing that is approved by the State of Connecticut Department of Consumer Protection;
- Farmers may only process jams, jellies and acidified foods.

Statute:

CGS Section 21a-24a. Sale of acidified food products, jams, jellies and preserves. (a) As used in this section:

(1) "Acidified food product" means a food item, with a pH value of 4.6 or less upon completion of the recipe for such product, including, but not limited to, pickles, salsa and hot sauce, produced on the premises of a residential farm. "Acidified food product" does not include food consisting in whole or in part of milk or milk products, eggs, meat, poultry, fish, shellfish, edible crustacean ingredients or other ingredients, including synthetic ingredients, in a form capable of supporting rapid and progressive growth of infectious or toxigenic microorganisms.

(5) "Residential farm" means property (A) being utilized as a farm, as defined in subsection (q) of section 1-1, and (B) serving as the primary residence of the owner of such property.

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(b) Notwithstanding the provisions of sections 21a-91 to 21a-120, inclusive, and section 19-13-B40 of the regulations of Connecticut state agencies, the preparation and sale of acidified food products, jams, jellies or preserves on a residential farm shall be allowed in a room used as living quarters and exempt from inspection by any state or local agency, provided such acidified food products, jams, jellies or preserves are prepared with fruit or vegetables grown on such farm and in the case of acidified food products, provided (1) the water supply of such residential farm comes from a public water supply system or, if from a private well, is tested and tests negative for coliform bacteria, (2) a pH test of such acidified food products is performed by a laboratory after completion of the recipe for such acidified food products, (3) use of the kitchen where such acidified food products are prepared is restricted from nonprocessing individuals, pets, children or any other potential contaminants during such preparation, and (4) the preparer of such acidified food products (A) possesses documentation of such preparer's successful completion of an examination concerning safe food handling techniques administered by an organization approved by the Department of Public Health for qualified food operators, or possesses documentation indicating successful completion of an approved course concerning safe food processing techniques administered by an organization approved by the Department of Consumer Protection, and (B) such documentation is made available to the local health department or the Department of Consumer Protection upon request. If the local health department or the Department of Public Health has reason to believe that a private well used pursuant to subdivision (1) of this subsection may be contaminated with coliform bacteria, such department may require such private well to be retested for the presence of coliform bacteria. Each container of acidified food products, jam, jelly or preserves offered for sale on such farm shall have on its label, in ten-point type: "Not prepared in a government inspected kitchen".

Tips:

- Have a scrupulously clean kitchen and process for making acidified foods. It is very easy to contaminate your products and make customers quite sick.
- Follow an approved recipe. Go to the [USDA website](#) or the [Ball Canning website](#) to find recipes that are already approved. Alternately, you may submit your recipe to [Cornell University](#) where for a reasonable fee they will test and approve the recipe.
- Follow the recipe quantities exactly. Substitutions and even slight changes in volume or amount can create an incorrect pH level threatening the safety of the product. For instance, adding a few extra cucumbers so that they don't go to waste will alter the pH level and make the product unsafe.
- Keep detailed records of your processing activities. If there is ever a need to recall your product, detailed records will allow you to narrow the scope of the recall and provide evidence to any investigating authority that you have followed proper procedures.

- Check with your [local health departments](#). Health Departments have a wealth of information and resources and should be consulted with at the beginning of your processing planning regardless of whether you are using a farm kitchen or commercial kitchen. If you have a commercial kitchen, local health departments can vary in how they handle licensing and/or processing. In general, the local health department licenses the kitchen while the Department of Consumer Protection oversees processing.

Labels should include the following information:

- 1) Common or usual product name
- 2) Farm name
- 3) Ingredient list in descending order of weight
- 4) Location of production
- 5) “Pickle Bill” disclaimer language
- 6) Code for processing date and batch
- 7) Source of ingredients
- 8) Net product quantity (weight or volume)
- 9) Potential allergens

FAQs:

Q: Where can I find tested recipes?

A: Many excellent recipes can be found at www.freshpreserving.com which is the Ball canning site. In addition, try the [National Center for Home Food Preservation](#) website which offers a large variety of tested recipes.

Q: Can I have my children help me pickle excess cucumbers that we can't sell?

A: Canning and processing acidified foods should be a carefully monitored, sterile process. Because it is so easy to contaminate your product, we recommend that you take some type of canning class above and beyond the safe food handling class that most farmers typically take to comply with Connecticut law. The most thorough class, the Better Processing School lasts 2-3 days. This class can be taken [on-line](#) through the University of California Cooperative Extension Department or in-person through the Northeast Center for Food Entrepreneurship at the Cornell University College of Agriculture and Life Sciences or at the [Rutgers University New Jersey Agriculture Experiment Station Office of Continuing Professional Education Department](#). Additional training is available through [UCONN extension](#) or by watching a Ball canning video on-line. These educational programs will review the critical steps in processing foods to avoid spoilage. Anyone involved in the processing should be properly trained and understand the importance of following the processing rules. Before beginning canning, all floors, counters and other surfaces should be carefully cleaned and all pets and other animals removed from the canning area.

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Q: What about processing tomato sauce and salsa? Do these products fit under the Pickle Bill regulations?

A: Currently Connecticut laws and regulations allow for the processing of jams, jellies, preserves and acidified foods in a farm kitchen. The intent of the legislation was to explicitly permit farmers to can and sell pickled foods in addition to the previously allowed jam and jelly exemption. While technically many recipes for salsa and tomato sauce would comply with current regulations, the law does not explicitly detail the guidelines for salsas and tomato sauces. Tomato sauces and salsa can have widely varying acid levels based on the selected recipe and acidity of the produce variety used. This variability can make determining whether the product falls under the pickle bill regulations unpredictable. We recommend that you confer with the [Connecticut Department of Consumer Protection Food Division](#) before deciding to process and sell any of these products.

Q: What about labels? What should be included on my label?

A: At a minimum your label should include the name of the product, name of your farm, ingredient list, location of production, required pickle bill disclaimer, a code that indicates the processing date, batch and source of ingredients, net product quantity and any potential allergens. The [State Department of Consumer Protection](#) offers a label review service which can provide advice on proper labeling.

Notes: