

What Food Manufacturers Need to Know to Sell to the Food Service Industry



For food manufacturers, the food service industry is an essential target market, second only to grocery stores in volume.

The food service industry includes local restaurants, restaurant chains, hotels, caterers, hall and banquet facilities, business cafeterias, government agencies like hospitals, prisons and other institutions, and large distributors, such as Sysco. And the food service industry is growing. For example, Restaurants Canada reports that restaurant sales have increased every year for the past 25 years, with no signs of a slowdown.

To be successful, food service operators need a diverse, abundant, dependable supply of food. Health-conscious customers want to know where their food comes from and who made it, and they are often willing to pay a bit more if they know their purchases are creating jobs and supporting the economy.

Where there's demand, there's opportunity.

If you are a food manufacturer and you are not selling your product to the food service industry, you may be missing a great opportunity. If you think this might be a good fit for your business, how do you get started?

Small farmers and processors often start a relationship with food services by simply talking to the owners or managers of independent restaurants and smaller hospitality businesses. This accomplishes several important goals:

- It increases familiarity with, and demand for, your products.

- It helps you better understand the food service operator's needs.
- It builds a relationship with the food service operator.

It is important to prepare thoroughly before meeting with food service operators. Here are some questions you need to ask yourself and be able to answer, before you meet with a chef, purchaser or food service owner.

Quality and Taste

- Are the quality and taste at a level that appeal to chefs?
- Can you deliver the same quality consistently?

Demand (need/trends)

- Why do they want your product?
- Is there a demand for it in food service? Will there be?
- Who supplies them now?
- Why is your product better?
- Can you fulfill a need or provide a value-added service?

Versatility

- Can your product be used in different applications?
- Is it easy to work with?

Availability/Quantity/Capacity

- Can you accurately state the amount of product you will have and guarantee delivery?
- Can you meet the potential demand?
- Is it seasonal?
- What is the shelf life?
- Can you ensure consistent portion sizes?

Pricing

- How much do your products cost to produce and what profit do you expect?
- Do you have a price list available?
- Is it clear and easy to read?
- Are your prices realistic?

Distribution and Delivery

- How do customers order your products?
- How will you transport and deliver them to your customers?
- How are your orders packaged?
- Do you have minimum order requirements?

Packaging

- Is the product packaged in food safe containers?
- Is there a consistent number of an item or a set weight, in each container?
- Are the packages correctly packaged and clearly labeled?
- Is the packaging chef-friendly?

Responsiveness (customer service)

- How can your customers reach you?
- Can you guarantee a response time?
- How often will you be in touch with them?

When you meet with a food service provider, it is essential that you bring a sell sheet, so you can leave them with a handy resource that has all the information they need to list your product. If you have answers to the questions above, you are well on your way to creating an effective sell sheet.

For more information, see **Manitoba Agriculture and Resource Development's** guide with details and inside tips for creating a sell sheet.



For more information

- Go to manitoba.ca/agriculture and click on Food and Ag Processing
- Email us at mbagrifood@gov.mb.ca
- Visit your local Manitoba Agriculture and Resource Development Office