Farmer Welcome Packet

INTRODUCTION

Illinois Equitable Access Towards Sustainable Systems (IL-EATS), funded by LFPA

Illinois Equitable Access Towards Sustainable Systems (IL-EATS) is an opportunity to unite Illinoisans invested in building a resilient food system and create a collaborative network of food system support. IL-EATS is funded by the United States Department of Agriculture Agricultural Marketing Service's (AMS) Local Food Purchase Assistance (LFPA) program. The program is authorized by the American Rescue Plan as part of the "Build Back Better" initiative and was established to strengthen statewide food systems over two years. Funding must be used to buy food from growers/producers and distribute it at no cost to underserved communities. All states are eligible to receive this funding. Illinois is receiving $28 million and is committed to sourcing 100% of products from socially disadvantaged growers/producers and encouraging the distribution of culturally responsive foods.

Funds in the state will be received by the Illinois Department of Agriculture and distributed by the Illinois Department of Human Services. Technical support is provided by the University of Illinois Extension.

Website: https://go.illinois.edu/il-eats

The primary goals of IL-EATS are:

- To support local and socially disadvantaged growers/producers by expanding the economic opportunities to get their products to markets
- To broaden partnerships with growers/producers and the food distribution community to ensure the distribution of fresh foods to underserved communities

Benefits for farmers participating in IL-EATS

- Technical assistance
- Food safety training
- Education and professional development to grow your business
- Opportunities to expand your market and feed communities
- Networking opportunities with local food system partners

IL-EATS Program Support

The University of Illinois Extension is providing education opportunities and technical assistance for growers and producers in the program. If you have questions, comments, or ideas for professional development you'd like to share, please reach out to us at uie-lfpa@illinois.edu.

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FOOD SAFETY REQUIREMENTS

Growers and food handlers need to meet minimum food safety standards for the project and are expected to continually maintain best practices for food safety throughout the program and beyond. All growers and producers must follow state and federal requirements for their products. Additional food safety standards may be required depending on where the food is distributed.

By providing funds for the purchase of food through IL-EATS, IDOA, IDHS, and Illinois Extension are not guaranteeing that the product is safe for consumption. IDOA, IDHS, and Illinois Extension are not responsible for any injury that may result from food purchased and consumed through the IL-EATS program.

Fruit and vegetable growers

Growers who would like to sell produce to IL-EATS must:

Have a certificate from an approved food safety course (e.g., Produce Safety Alliance Grower Training on the FSMA Produce Safety Rule, GAP, third-party certifications, etc.) **OR**

Complete one of the food safety training options listed under the food safety section of our website. Fruit and vegetable growers who *do not* hold one of the approved food safety course certifications listed above must register for food safety training within 60 days of their contract start date. All food safety trainings offered by Illinois Extension are provided at no cost. Options are primarily virtual, including the Produce Safety Alliance Grower Training on the FSMA Produce Safety Rule, a virtual Produce Food

Safety Bootcamp offered via Zoom, and an at-your-own-pace Produce Food Safety Learn@Extension course. Additional sessions may be scheduled as needed.

Food safety course certificate

If you are a produce grower who has already completed an approved food safety course (Produce Safety Alliance Grower Training on the FSMA Produce Safety Rule, GAP, third-party certification, etc.), please let your lead agency know! They may ask to see a copy of your certificate. Your lead agency will verify that you meet the IL-EATS food safety requirement to sell your produce.
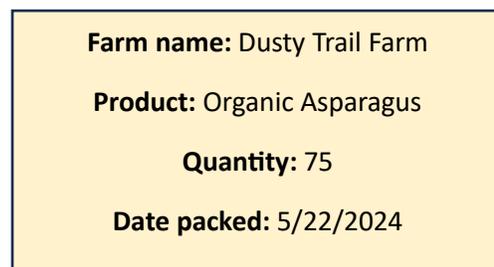
Producers

All producers who would like to sell their products to IL-EATS must meet the federal and state requirements for that product. For all other producers, taking the IL-EATS food safety training options offered for fruit and vegetable growers is not required. Below is a list of some of Illinois' requirements for selling eggs, meat, poultry, fish, juice, dairy, and value-added products (IDPH 2023). This is not a comprehensive list. More information can be found on the Illinois Department of Agriculture website, the Illinois Department of Public Health website, or the Illinois Farmers Market Food Safety Guide.

- Eggs: Must have an Illinois Egg Handler's License
- Meat and poultry: Use of IDOA or USDA-licensed processors
- Fish: Processed in an inspected facility using a HACCP plan
- Juice: Processed in an inspected facility (HACCP regulations apply if selling wholesale)
- Dairy: Processed in a department/state-licensed facility
- Value-added products:
  - Maple syrup: Bottled in an inspected facility
  - Canned goods: Made in an inspected facility and must meet pH requirements

Labeling requirements

Each case or box must include a basic label or sticker that can be handwritten, printed, or pre-printed with the following information:

- **Name of farm/business**
- Farm address (optional)
- **Product name**
- **Quantity in box/case**
- **Date packed**

Farm name: Dusty Trail Farm

Product: Organic Asparagus

Quantity: 75

Date packed: 5/22/2024

Example label for a case/box of IL-EATS product

Food pre-packaged before distribution (such as eggs, meat, dairy, juice, etc.) has additional labeling requirements. While additional information can be included on the label, the **content required by IL-EATS is in bold** (IDPH 2023):

- **Name of farm/business/processor**
- Farm address (optional)
- **Product name**
- Net contents (weight or volume) of the package (optional)
- **All ingredients of food products:** including colors, artificial flavors, and preservatives, and listed in descending order by predominance of weight shown with common or usual names
- **Safe handling instructions for meat and poultry products, including eggs**
- **Other labeling information as required by federal, state, or local jurisdictions**
- **Allergen labeling as specified by the FDA:**
    - When required, labeling for allergens should include any of the following if found in the product: milk, eggs, fish, shellfish, tree nuts, peanuts, wheat, soy, and sesame. Labels should indicate which of these are in the product. Example: Contains: "Milk and Wheat"
    - For more information regarding food allergens, reference the [Food Allergen and Consumer Protection Act of 2004](#)
- **Nutrition facts labels may be required** depending on your product and business size. According to the Code of Federal Regulations, nutrition information is required unless your business or product falls under an exemption. While we recommend researching the requirements for your product, some of the exemptions include:
    - Meat products produced by businesses that employ 500 or fewer people (9 CFR 317.400)
    - Eggs (FSIS 2021)
    - Small business exemption (FDA 2007)
        - Retailers with annual gross sales of not more than $500,000 or with annual gross sales of foods of not more than $50,000
        - Exemption notices do not need to be filed with the FDA
    - Low volume product exemption (FDA 2007)

- Person/business employs fewer than an average of 100 full-time employees, and fewer than 100,000 units of that product are sold in the United States in a 12-month period
- Exemption notice must be filed annually with the FDA

Date-labeling phrases, such as "Sell-by," "Use-by," or "Best if used by/before," are not required by the USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service and thus are voluntary for products sold to the IL-EATS program. However, "sell-by" dates may be required for eggs to meet the grade requirements (Grade A vs. Grade AA).

Examples from Illinois Farmers Market Food Safety Guide (IDPH 2023):

Meat

Eggs

Labeling for Eggs

Grade AA: 30 day sell by code. Must meet Grade AA standards.

Grade A: 45 day sell by date code. Must meet Grade A standards.

US Recognized Sizes:
Jumbo = 30 oz.   Medium = 21 oz.
Extra Large = 27 oz.   Small = 18 oz.
Large = 24 oz.

Sell by Jan 31, 2022

Grade A   **Large**

1 DOZEN EGGS

Jones Family Farm
2375 Jones Road, Leroy, IL 28463
License #12345

Dates:
Grade A = No later than 45 days from candle/pack date.
Grade AA = No later than 30 days from candle/pack date.

Labeling your product as Illinois-grown (optional):

If you'd like, your packaging may include the words: "Illinois-grown", "Illinois-sourced", or "Illinois farm product".

Additionally, you may choose to participate in the Illinois Product Logo program. The program identifies Illinois products using a registered trademark and is available for free to any Illinois food or agribusiness-related company in Illinois. Organizations that wish to use the logo must register with the Illinois Department of Agriculture by filling out the Agreement for Use Of "Illinois Product(s)" Certified Mark form. After your application is approved, you will receive a high-resolution logo for marketing and promotional activities, including packaging.

Transportation food safety guidelines

Check in with your lead agency regarding delivery. In some cases, your lead agency may pick up the product directly from your farm; in others, you may be delivering the product. Regardless of who is transporting the product, the following transportation guidelines must be followed.

Refrigeration

Meat, poultry, fish, dairy, pre-cut produce, and pasteurized juice must be transported and held at or below 41˚F. Whole, uncut produce may be transported above 41˚F as long as product quality is not compromised (IDPH 2023). If possible, we recommend cold storage to maintain maximum quality. Eggs may be held and sold at 45°F.

As an alternative to mechanical refrigeration, an effectively insulated, hard-sided, cleanable cooler with sufficient ice or other cold-holding methods are allowed. The use of dry ice or blue ice packs are recommended over loose or bagged ice. Any ice or water used to maintain cold temperatures must be of safe drinking quality. Mechanical refrigeration is not required. However, if you are unable to maintain proper temperatures, your lead agency may require an effective, alternative form of maintaining temperatures, such as reducing the amount of product in a cooler or mechanical refrigeration (Marbleseed 2023 and IDPH 2023).

Vehicles

During transportation and delivery, food and food equipment must be protected from insects, flies, animals, dust and dirt, unnecessary handling, and other contamination (IDPH 2023). Delivery vehicles or equipment used for transportation must be kept clean. Vehicles must be inspected to ensure they are clean and in good working condition, including maintaining desired temperatures before transporting food. Fresh produce and other ready-to-eat food items should not mix with raw meats during loading, transportation, or delivery.

Sanitizers

It is recommended to use sanitizers on equipment and surfaces as needed to reduce the number of foodborne illnesses causing germs. For assistance in choosing an EPA sanitizer appropriate for the type of surface you are sanitizing, review the Produce Safety Alliance database of [EPA-Labeled Sanitizers for Produce](#). The most common types of sanitizers are Quaternary Ammonia and Chlorine (bleach). Follow the manufacturers' instructions when using sanitizers and wear appropriate protective clothing. Test strips for the specific sanitizer can ensure the sanitizer is being mixed correctly.

IL-EATS does not require produce to be washed before transportation/distribution. However, you are highly encouraged to check with your lead agency, as they may have different requirements. If you want to wash your produce, the water must meet the "No detectable E.coli/100mL" quality standard. Also, growers may need to add sanitizer to the wash water to prevent the accumulation of microorganisms and cross-contamination.

Packaging guidelines

Check-in with your lead agency for their packaging and palletizing requirements (e.g., size of the package, type of package, the number of items packed in each case or box, etc.). If using boxes, we recommend you buy high-quality white waxed boxes. Cheap boxes will collapse during shipment and cost you more money. Packaging must be safe and adequate for the intended food product. It is recommended to avoid reusing packages designed as single-use. If your lead agency requires palletizing, all pallets must have a label that includes the following:

- Farmer name
- Receiver name
- Product
- Quantity

OPERATING PROCEDURES

Allowable Foods List

Foods purchased with IL-EATS funds must be grown and produced in Illinois and be minimally processed. Allowable foods include fruits and vegetables, grain products such as pasta and rice, meats, beans/legumes, and dairy products. Foods can be in a variety of processing states (e.g., whole, cut, pureed, etc.) and forms (e.g., fresh, frozen, canned, dried, etc.). Foods that are significantly processed or prepared can NOT be purchased through IL-EATS. Examples include baked goods such as bread, prepackaged meals, and other prepared and pre-cooked items that come ready-to-eat and require no further preparation beyond heating (e.g., chicken nuggets, fish sticks, pre-made pizza, etc.).

The Illinois Local Food Purchasing Assistance Allowable Foods List contains a complete list of eligible products. Email uie-lfpa@illinois.edu for questions related to this list.

Cultural Foods

Illinois is committed to using IL-EATS funds to provide culturally responsive foods to underserved communities. We encourage you to review the Cultural Food Guide for a list of culturally requested foods in different regions within Illinois. If you're interested in meeting this need, we suggest you have a conversation with your lead agency about commonly requested cultural foods that you may be able to provide.

Fair Market Value

As part of IL-EATS, you will be paid fair market value for your products using the values on our Fair Market Value List. Prices are estimated to be at wholesale or better and will stay the same for the duration of the program. Prices may be adjusted if there are extreme market disruptions, which will be handled on a case-by-case basis. Your compensation for each product type will be negotiated between you and your lead agency but must fall within the range of values listed. Lead agencies must pay at least the minimum value of the Fair Market Value range. Potential reasons for receiving above the minimum price include:

- Production practices: Organic growing practices, regenerative farming, cage-free, certified humane, etc.
- Transportation: If you transport your product to the lead agency or community partner
- Packaging: If you use a high-quality packaging to transport and sell your product
- Processing: If you take your product to a processor for additional processing
- Aggregating: If you take your product to an aggregator and they charge an aggregation fee

Charging a higher price for your product within the Fair Market Value range is meant to offset some of the above costs. If you have questions about this list or would like a product to be added to this list, reach out at uie-lfpa@illinois.edu.

Rejection Policy

All goods provided by growers and producers of IL-EATS must be fresh, high-quality products that follow the minimum food safety standards outlined in this document. Food purchased with IL-EATS funds cannot be food rescue quality or seconds. Any goods that do not comply with the quality and food safety standards of IL-EATS may be rejected by the receiving entity (lead agency or community partner). The determination of whether goods comply with specifications is at the discretion of the primary receiving entities. For example, if a lead agency receives the product before distribution to a community partner, the decision to accept or reject the product is the responsibility of the lead agency. Growers and producers will not receive payment for products that do not comply with the IL-EATS quality and food safety standards. If the product is rejected, the receiving entity (lead agency or community partner) must maintain a record of the rejection with information including farm name, date, type of product rejected, and the reason for rejection.

Acceptable reasons for rejection:

- Product is too warm (not transported or stored in proper temperatures)
- Product is moldy or deteriorating
- Product is stored in dirty or unsanitary containers
- Product is transported in dirty or unsanitary vehicles
- Product is in packaging that is dented, ripped, or rusted
- Product that the receiver has a reason to believe may compromise public health when consumed
- Product does not meet the labeling requirements as described above
- Product does not meet the minimum food safety requirements as described above

Invoice and Bill of Lading

Invoices are a required part of IL-EATS and an important piece of how you will receive payment. Farmers will be responsible for invoicing the lead agency for your products. It is important to list the different types of food provided, so please separate items by type on the invoice. A full-size version is available in the Appendix.

A Bill of Lading is a legal document that includes information on the type, quantity, and destination of the products being carried. It acts as a contract between a carrier and a shipper. It can also serve as a receipt that verifies when the carrier has delivered the products. Bill of Ladings accompany the products being transported and must be signed by the carrier, shipper, and receiver. It is NOT required by IL-EATS but may be required by your lead agency.

Example invoice by Marbleseed, edited by Illinois Extension (2023)

Product Liability Insurance

While it is not a requirement of IL-EATS to hold product liability insurance, it is strongly recommended. Product liability insurance can help protect your business from any liabilities associated with selling a product consumed by a customer, including protection if a food-borne illness results from a product you sold (Kime & McGee, 2023).

Some lead agencies may have umbrella coverage for the products they distribute. This is on a case-by-case basis and not guaranteed. Most wholesale and institutional buyers also require growers/producers to carry product liability insurance, typically between $1-5 million (CFPAC 2021).

For more information on product liability insurance, the following are helpful resources:

- PennState Extension - Product Liability Insurance: General overview of product liability insurance for growers/producers
- CFPAC – Guide for Growers and Food Businesses: Information on product liability insurance for growers/producers interested in selling to wholesale or institutional markets
- University of Kentucky - MarketReady Producer Training Program: Various tools, including a MarketReady Insurance Checklist to evaluate readiness for commercial markets, a Product Liability Insurance FAQ, and other helpful resources.

OTHER

Buy Fresh Buy Local (Optional)

Buy Fresh Buy Local is a directory to help consumers and potential markets connect with local farmers in Illinois. Registration is open to all farmers who grow or raise food for sale to the public, including family farms, orchards, apiaries, CSAs, farm stands, and U-Pick. Aggregators, distributors, and institutions regularly purchasing from local farms are encouraged to sign up. Registration is FREE.

To learn more and sign up, visit Buy Fresh Buy Local.

Technical Assistance Feedback

Networking

Below are some ideas for potential networking opportunities. Let us know if there are any that you are interested in:

- Facebook group

- Regular virtual regional meetings
- Regular all farmer meetings
- In-person events
- Mentorship opportunities
- Farm tours

Professional Development

Below is a list of potential networking and professional development opportunities for growers and producers participating in IL-EATS. All options would be offered at no cost. It is important that the opportunities we offer are relevant and beneficial to you! Please let us know which options you are most excited about.

FarmTabs

FarmTabs is an excellent, free software developed by Iowa Valley Resource Conservation and Development to meet farmers' needs for traceability. It also automatically generates labels that farmers can use on their products. Traceability is a requirement for developing a Food Safety Plan. FarmTabs requires access to a computer and basic Excel knowledge.

Compass Toolbox

Compass Tools are free downloadable spreadsheets created at the Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems, University of Wisconsin-Madison. These tools help farmers actively manage increased profits by helping them understand production costs by product and market channel. This enables farmers to make strategic decisions to adjust prices, reduce costs, shift market channel focus, reduce or drop unprofitable products, and expand production of their most profitable ventures.

Minority, Veteran, Women-Owned, and/or Disadvantaged Business Certification

The city of Chicago and Cook County provide incentives in the contracting process to local companies certified as minority-owned, women-owned, veteran-owned, service-disabled veteran-owned, persons with disability-owned, disadvantaged businesses, etc. The minority/woman-owned business certifications cost $250 and must be renewed every five years. The veterans, disability-owned, and disadvantaged business certifications are free. There are a lot of local organizations that can help businesses become certified (CFPAC 2021).

REFERENCES

Chicago Food Policy Action Council. (2021). *Pt. IV: Requirements for Institutional Markets.* Chicago Food Policy Action Council. https://www.chicagofoodpolicy.com/producer-manual-requirements

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Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS). (2021, April 11). *Labeling*. Usda.gov. https://www.fsis.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media_file/2021-06/08_Labeling_Final_04112021.pdf

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United States Food and Drug Administration. (2007, May 7). *Small Business Nutrition Labeling Exemption Guide*. FDA. https://www.fda.gov/food/labeling-nutrition-guidance-documents-regulatory-information/small-business-nutrition-labeling-exemption-guide

CHANGE LOG

- 4/5/2024: Labeling requirements updated for pre-packaged goods to include relevant federal exemptions. Required labeling information was bolded.
- 4/12/2024: Following feedback of Lead Agency Onboarding Meeting 3
  - Food safety refrigeration requirements updated to allow transport of whole, uncut produce at temperatures above 41°F as long as quality is not compromised. Exceptions were removed from the document as they were redundant.
  - Rejection policy language updated to reflect that the primary receiving entity is responsible for deciding whether to accept or reject the product

APPENDIX

Sample Invoice

INVOICE

Farm Business Name:

Farm Address:

INVOICE #:

Phone #:

DATE:

TO:

Lead Agency Name
ATTN: IL-EATS Program
P.O. Box 123
Carrot Valley, IL 45678

FOR:

Farm Products for IL-EATS Program

PRODUCT DESCRIPTION	$/UNIT	# OF UNITS	$ AMOUNT
TOTAL			

Make all checks payable to:

THANK YOU FOR YOUR BUSINESS!