



Addendum to the 2024 Cottage Food Guide

The Cottage Food Guide was updated in 2026 to reflect changes to various laws, rules and regulations, and state guidelines and safety standards. The updates are noted in this addendum to the 2024 guide.

Find the 2026 edition of the Cottage Food Guide at go.illinois.edu/CottageFood.

Pages 3 and 4: Updates to FAQ: What is a Cottage Food Operation?

Added

Can I make cottage foods in a licensed commercial kitchen?

No. Cottage foods must be made in your residential kitchen or kitchen on your farm that is registered under cottage food. When you prepare food in a licensed kitchen, you must obtain a license from your local health department. Contact your local health department to determine which license is appropriate.

Replaced

FORMER:

Can I be a registered cottage food operation and have a commercial kitchen license at the same time?

Yes, but this can become a complicated situation quickly. Products made for the cottage food operation registration do not fall under the same rules as those made under the commercial kitchen license, and vice versa. It is important to keep very clear records of products made for each business and ensure compliance with the correct set of regulations.

NEW:

Can I have a retail food license and be a registered cottage food operation at the same time?

Yes, however, cottage foods may not be prepared in your licensed facility. If you are selling both cottage foods and foods made in a licensed facility at the same time, you must clearly separate and distinguish these foods for consumers. Cottage foods must include clear labeling and signage to differentiate them from the foods made in the licensed facility. The name of the business can remain the same if you carry both a cottage food and a commercial license, but labeling must be clear to differentiate the two.

If your home kitchen is a commercially licensed kitchen on your property, you can produce cottage food products out of it. It becomes even more imperative to clearly demonstrate to consumers whether your products are cottage food or commercially prepared.

Page 7: Update to What Can I Make Under the Cottage Food Law?

Added

FAQ: What Can I Make?

Why are these ingredients NOT allowed under the Cottage Food Law?

Meat, poultry, fish, seafood, or shellfish:

- These products present several hazards that must be addressed, including their source, proper storage, preparation, cooking temperatures, and holding temperatures to ensure safe serving. Incorrect handling can quickly lead to the growth of dangerous bacteria and pathogens.

Dairy, except as an ingredient in a non-potentially hazardous baked good or candy, or as an ingredient in baked good frosting such as buttercream:

- Dairy products pose several hazards that must be addressed, including source, storage, and holding temperatures to ensure safety. Dairy can be used in limited ways that are less likely to cause foodborne illness. Improper handling can quickly lead to the growth of dangerous bacteria and pathogens.

Eggs, except when used as an ingredient in a non-potentially hazardous food, such as dry noodles, or in a baked good frosting like buttercream, if the eggs are not raw.

- Eggs pose several safety hazards that must be addressed before serving, including their source, storage, preparation, cooking temperatures, and holding temperatures. Eggs can be used in limited ways that are less likely to cause foodborne illness. Incorrect handling can quickly lead to the growth of dangerous bacteria and pathogens.

Pumpkin pies, sweet potato pies, cheesecakes, custard pies, creme pies, and pastries with potentially hazardous fillings or toppings:

- These baked goods present hazards that must be managed to ensure safe serving, including maintaining proper holding temperatures. The higher water content and, in the case of pumpkin and sweet potato, their density, along with ingredients like dairy and eggs, can quickly promote the growth of harmful bacteria and pathogens.

Garlic in oil or garlic-infused oil, unless the garlic oil is acidified:

- Garlic can be a source of *Clostridium botulinum*. When garlic is placed in oil, the low-acid, oxygen-free environment favors the growth of these bacteria. Acidification prevents bacterial growth.

Low-acid canned foods:

- Improperly canned, low-acid foods have a potential for botulism, a deadly foodborne illness caused by the bacteria *Clostridium botulinum*. Canned foods without sufficient

acid create an anaerobic environment that can rapidly grow botulism. Because high temperatures are needed to kill botulism spores, water bath canning is not sufficient to produce a safe, low-acid canned food.

Sprouts:

- Sprouts have several hazards that need to be controlled during production. Bacteria that can cause foodborne illness can be on seeds or introduced during the growing process. Sprouts are grown in humid, warm environments that are ideal for bacterial growth, without the mitigating effect of “good” soil bacteria. This ingredient is associated with a very high rate of foodborne illness.

Cut leafy greens except for cut leafy greens that are dehydrated, acidified, or blanched and frozen:

- Cutting or shredding leafy greens exposes internal fluids and nutrients, which may support the growth of pathogens when not properly handled. Handling leafy greens safely requires additional considerations for personal hygiene and for holding temperatures to ensure safe serving.

Cut or pureed fresh tomato or melon; dehydrated tomato or melon; frozen cut melon:

- Cut tomatoes have been associated with outbreaks of *Salmonella*.
- As melons grow in the field, their rinds are exposed to bacteria from multiple contamination sources. Bacteria can transfer from the rind to the inside of the melon when it is cut. Cut melons have been linked to *Salmonella* outbreaks.

Wild-harvested, non-cultivated mushrooms:

- Some wild mushrooms that are extremely poisonous may be difficult to distinguish from edible species. The risk of misidentification and resulting injury or death from wild-harvested mushrooms is

high without regular inspection and source verification, which are not required at the Cottage Food Operation (CFO) level of regulation.

Alcoholic beverages; kombucha:

- Alcoholic beverages are regulated by the Illinois Liquor Control Commission.
- Kombucha has unique biological, chemical, physical, and allergenic hazards.

These ingredients require additional food safety requirements that are not available in a home kitchen. See “Scaling Up” on page 23.

Page 9: Update to Frostings and Icings

Replaced

FORMER:

Frostings and icings, such as buttercream, are allowed under the Cottage Food Law. These frostings and icings may not contain raw eggs. Powdered dehydrated eggs, such as those in meringue powder, are allowed. Dairy, such as butter and cream, are allowed in frosting. In general, it is accepted that dairy in a buttercream frosting (that does not include eggs) is a stable product because of the large amounts of powdered sugar added. Sugar binds with available water and creates a product with a lower water activity.

Although not required by the law, your local health department may ask you to provide a water activity test to verify that your recipe produces a non-hazardous product that does not need to be stored, transported, and sold under 41 F (see Potentially Hazardous Foods or TCS Foods on page 11). If you cannot verify that your frosting is shelf stable, they may ask you to store, transport, and sell your frosting under 41 F. Cream cheese frosting should always be transported and sold under 41 F.

NEW:

Frostings and icings, such as buttercream, are allowed under the Cottage Food Law. Dairy products like butter and cream are permitted in frosting. Frostings and icings may not contain raw eggs, including pasteurized raw eggs. You may use powdered dehydrated eggs, such as meringue powder, instead of raw eggs.

All frostings and icings that do not contain raw eggs or other banned ingredients are allowed. Your health department may ask you to provide a water activity test to verify that your recipe produces a non-hazardous product that does not need to be stored, transported, or sold at 41 F. If you cannot verify that your frosting is shelf-stable, they may ask you to store, transport, and sell it at temperatures below 41 F. The law permits health departments to require storage, transportation, and sale at 41 F or below when the frosting’s water activity exceeds the acceptable shelf-stable limit. However, the law does not mandate this check, leaving it to your local health department’s discretion. See “Testing” page 26.

Food safety science behind the scenes: Frostings and icings containing dairy can still be safe due to low water activity, even if the frosting looks “wet.” An example is a “flood” stage royal icing made with meringue powder. The high sugar content in frostings and icings binds with available water, rendering it unavailable for the growth of microorganisms that cause food-borne illnesses. Some frostings or icings will have a water content to sugar ratio that does not bind enough water, leaving available water to grow food-borne illnesses. Many recipes for cream cheese or whipped cream frosting cross this line and should be kept below 41 F. Because recipes vary, it is possible to still make something like cream cheese frosting with enough sugar to be shelf stable. If you are in doubt whether a frosting can survive shipping to a lab to be tested for water activity without “growing something,” that is a pretty good sign that you should treat that frosting as a Time/Temperature Control for Safety (TCS). If you are unsure, test!

Page 10: Update to Baked Goods with Cheese

Replaced

FORMER:

Baked goods with cheese can be potentially hazardous foods. Cottage food operators are only allowed to produce non-potentially hazardous baked goods with cheese.

Cheesecake, custard pies, cream pies, etc. are not allowed as these are hazardous baked goods. Generally, the risk in baked goods with cheese can be mitigated by creating a water activity of 0.85 or less in the finished product. Examples of non-hazardous baked goods with cheese include cheddar sourdough, Asiago bagels, or Parmesan croissants.

In order to sell a baked good with cheese product that has a higher chance of a high water activity level, your local health department may require a test to verify that your recipe produces a non-potentially hazardous product. (See Water Activity Tests on page 14 and Potentially Hazardous Foods or TCS Foods on page 11.)

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Cheeses with high water content may require more testing per TCS food guidelines (page 11). An example of this is Cheddar cheese used in baked goods. Since cheddar can be either a hard, aged cheese with low water content or a semihard, young cheese with high water content, your health department might require

additional testing to verify the food safety of the specific cheddar you are using. Recipes approved for a cheese must use the approved cheese variety or brand.

Page 11: Update to FAQ: Mushrooms

Added

I purchased mushrooms from a person who foraged them in the wild. Is my receipt proof that they were purchased commercially and allowed?

No. Wild foraged mushrooms are prohibited, even when purchased commercially.

Page 11: Update to Fresh-Pressed Juices or Bottle Drinks

Added

FAQ: Drinks

Can I make lemonade, coffee, fresh-squeezed juices, smoothies, or other “immediate service” drinks on site?

Cottage foods must be prepared, packaged, and labeled in your home kitchen and then transported. Pre-bottled drinks are allowed. Drinks cannot be made, prepared, brewed, squeezed, or dispensed on site. To serve drinks prepared on-site, you will need to obtain a permit from your local health department. Contact your local health department to determine which permit is required.

Page 11: Update to FAQ: Allowed Foods

Added

Can I sell sourdough bread or starters?

Yes. Sourdough bread and starter are allowed under cottage food law. They are not considered a Time and Temperature Control for Safety (TCS) Food, and therefore do not need to be refrigerated. Sourdough bread and starter are widely considered safe and do not fall under the fermented food rules for cottage food. They require no special process or food safety plan.

Page 12: Update to FAQ: Allowed Foods

Removed

Are dehydrated foods allowed?

Yes, as long as no prohibited ingredients (such as meat, dairy, etc.) are included. For safety, aim for a water activity of 0.85 or less. (No test is required by law for dehydrated foods.)

Page 13: Update to Home Canning

Replaced

FORMER:

Boiling Water Bath Canning

Heat is transferred to the food by the boiling water that surrounds the jars. This boiling temperature of 212°F for the time specified in an approved recipe is sufficient to destroy molds, yeasts, enzymes, and some bacteria. Processing times are usually given for altitudes under 1,000 feet above sea level.

Illinois' mean elevation is 600 feet above sea level with the highest point of elevation (1,235 feet) at Charles Mound in northern Jo Daviess County. At higher altitudes, water boils at lower temperatures, making it necessary to process foods longer.

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Under Cottage Food Law, only high-acid foods may be canned. These foods may be naturally high in acid or low in water activity due to their sugar content, as in strawberry jam. Or they may be artificially lowered in water activity, such as by adding sugar to fruit syrups or by adding acid to pickles and canned tomato products, bringing the final pH level to 4.6 or below.

It is important to understand a product's natural pH and whether you need to add sugar or acid to achieve a safe, high-acid, or low-water-activity final product. For example, many berries are naturally high in sugar, allowing a cottage food operator to follow a "standard" sugar-to-fruit ratio to create a safe jam or jelly. But this same standard ratio, when used with low-sugar, low-acid elderberry, does NOT produce a safe jam or jelly. Similarly, ingredients like pumpkin or sweet potato can create a finished product that is too thick, making acid distribution uneven and unsafe, while also being too high in water activity. Following an approved recipe or testing can help you determine whether your finished products maintain a consistent pH throughout.

Page 14: Update to FAQ About Testing

Added

Do I need both a pH and a Water Activity test to prove a food is not TCS?

Health departments determine whether a food is TCS by considering several factors, including pH and water activity. To rely on only water activity or pH and not both combined, the water activity level must be below 0.88, or the pH must be below 4.2. If a food is suspected to be TCS, your health department may request a lab test to determine whether it is safe. If neither pH nor water activity is likely to be below the maximum safety threshold, a health department may request that both tests be done to aid their decision-making.

Added

Freeze-Drying/Dehydrating

Freeze-dried or dehydrated foods are allowed as long as they do not contain any prohibited ingredients. For safety, aim for a water activity of 0.85 or less. No test is required by law for dehydrated foods. Freeze-drying or dehydrating does NOT permit the use of prohibited ingredients.

FAQ: Freeze-Dried and Dehydrated Foods

The law says I can't make dehydrated melon or tomato. Can I freeze-dry them instead?

No. Freeze-drying is a form of dehydration. Any ingredient or product that is not allowed to be made by dehydrating is also not allowed to be made by freeze-drying.

Do I need to acidify garlic when dehydrating or freeze-drying it?

No. Dehydrated garlic does not need to be acidified. Garlic that has NOT been dehydrated and will be used for oil or vinegar needs to be acidified.

Page 15: Update to FAQ: Sales Avenues

Added

Can I sell through a pop-up in a licensed facility, such as a bakery, coffee shop, or food truck?

Yes, as long as you or an employee of your cottage food operation is physically present, and it must be clear and readily apparent that the cottage food business is separate from the licensed facility. You must also include proper signage and labeling and otherwise comply with all regulations set forth in the cottage food law. Some suggested ways to delineate your cottage food products include:

- Set up a separate POS system to check out the cottage foods.
- Set up a separate station for the cottage foods.
- Create a separate menu for your cottage foods.

Replaced

FORMER:

Can I sell my product to a bakery or grocery store to resell?

No. Cottage food laws specifically state, "Food and drink produced by a Cottage Food Operation shall be sold directly to consumers for their own consumption and not for resale."

NEW:

Can I sell my product to a coffee shop, grocery, boutique, or other retail store?

No. Cottage foods can only be sold directly by the cottage food operator or an employee of the Cottage Food Operation. They cannot be sold wholesale, which is defined as "the selling of products to be retailed by others."

Page 16: Update to Labeling and Menus

Replaced

FORMER:

Labels should include:

- The name of the cottage food operation and unit of local government in which the cottage food operation is located
- The identifying registration number provided by the local health department on the certificate of registration and the name of the municipality or county in which the registration was filed
- The common or usual name of the food product
- All ingredients of the food product, including any color, artificial flavor, and preservative, listed in descending order by predominance of weight, shown with the common or usual names

- The following phrase featured prominently on the label:
- “This product was produced in a home kitchen not inspected by a health department that may also process common food allergens. If you have safety concerns, contact your local health department.”
- The date the product was processed
- Allergen labeling as specified in federal labeling requirements. This means that a cottage food operation on its label must identify if any of the ingredients are made from one of the following food groups: milk, eggs, wheat, peanuts, soybeans, fish, tree nuts, shellfish, and sesame.

NEW:

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- The name of the cottage food operation and unit of local government in which the cottage food operation is located
- The identifying registration number provided by the local health department on the certificate of registration and the name of the municipality or county in which the registration was filed
- The common or usual name of the food product
- All ingredients of the food product, including any color, artificial flavor, and preservative, listed in descending order by predominance of weight, shown with the common or usual names

The following phrase featured prominently on the label:

- “This product was produced in a home kitchen not inspected by a health department that may also process common food allergens. If you have safety concerns, contact your local health department.”
- The full date (month/day/year) on which the product was processed
- Allergen labeling as specified in federal

labeling requirements. This means that a cottage food operation on its label must identify if any of the ingredients are made from one of the following food groups: milk, eggs, wheat, peanuts, soybeans, fish, tree nuts, shellfish, and sesame.

Page 17: Update to FAQ: Labeling Added

Can I use reusable packaging?

Canned foods must be sold in mason-style jars. Acidified and fermented foods that are not canned may alternatively be offered in new, clean containers, with tight-fitting lids.

Reusable packaging is allowed if the following conditions are met:

- The take-home containers shall be designed and constructed for reuse in accordance with Section 3-304.17(B)(1) of the 2022 Food Code published by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.
- The take-home containers, including bags, cups, and lids, are kept clean, sanitary, and free of debris. They are smooth, durable, easy to clean, and designed to prevent disease-causing or disease-spreading bacteria.
- All packages must be properly labeled in accordance with cottage food law. If a label cannot be easily attached to a package, cottage food operators may request a variance from their local health department. The local health department has the discretion to approve or deny this request.
- Cake safes and other delivery systems are allowed as long as they are smooth, durable, non-porous, and easy to clean.

Replaced

FORMER:

Do I need to submit a label for every single item/product that I make?

A label is required for each product category listed on the registration form — not for every product that is being produced. If your labels are incorrect, you will be required to submit additional labels. A breakdown of each category can be found on the cottage food application under: “Section 2: Product Categories & Menu.

NEW:

Do I need to submit a label for every single item/product that I make?

The standard requires submitting a label from each product category as part of the application process. A local health department may request additional label examples during their review if you add more product categories to your menu after the initial approval or if labels are found to be consistently incorrect during the review. A breakdown of each category is available on the cottage food application under “Section 2: Product Categories & Menu.

Replaced

FORMER:

How large does the warning statement need to be?

It must be legible and on the main label.

NEW:

How large does the warning statement need to be?

It must be legible and on the product packaging.

Page 19: Labeling and Menus

Added

Labels should include:

- The name of the cottage food operation and unit of local government in which the cottage food operation is located
- The identifying registration number provided by the local health department on the certificate of registration and the name of the municipality or county in which the registration was filed
- The common or usual name of the food product
- All ingredients of the food product, including any color, artificial flavor, and preservative, listed in descending order by predominance of weight, shown with the common or usual names
- The following phrase featured prominently on the label:
 - “This product was produced in a home kitchen not inspected by a health department that may also process common food allergens. If you have safety concerns, contact your local health department.”
- The full date (month/day/year) on which the product was processed
- Allergen labeling as specified in federal labeling requirements. This means that a cottage food operation on its label must identify if any of the ingredients are made from one of the following food groups: milk, eggs, wheat, peanuts, soybeans, fish, tree nuts, shellfish, and sesame.
- Net Weight

Page 21: Example of Labeling

Added

Blueberry Scone

Ingredients: Flour (bleached wheat flour, niacin, iron, thiamin mononitrate, riboflavin, enzymes, folic acid), blueberries, milk (reduced fat milk, vitamin A palmitate, vitamin D3), butter (sweet cream, salt), eggs, sugar, baking powder (corn starch, sodium bicarbonate, sodium aluminum sulfate, monocalcium phosphate), salt
Contains: wheat, milk, eggs.

This product was produced in a home kitchen not subject to public health inspection that may also process common food allergens. If you have safety concerns, contact your local health department.

Produced by: Corine's Tasty Treats
Produced on: March 7, 2021
Registration #: 1234 Peoria County
Net Wt. 3 oz. (85 g)



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Illinois Extension
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

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