Food Safety

Division of

Food Safety

Acidified Food Guidance

What is an acidified food?
Foods are classified as acid, low-acid or acidified based on the natural acidity of the product. Acid foods have a pH at or below 4.6. Low-acid foods have a pH above 4.6. Acidified foods contain low-acid ingredients that have food-grade acids or other acidic foods added to them to lower the final equilibrium pH to 4.6 or below. A properly acidified food product may be safely stored at room temperature.

Examples of acidified food:
- Sauces
- Salsa
- Marinades
- Relishes
- Chow Chows
- Unusual jams or jellies (such as pepper jelly and mango jam)
- Some non-carbonated beverages (such as flavored water, teas and water-based products)
- Liquid nutritional/dietary supplements and liquid energy shots
- Pickled vegetables (such as beets, cocktail onions and peppers)
- Fermented green olives subjected to processes (such as lye treatment or washing with low-acid foods) that raise the pH above 4.6, with subsequent addition of acid or acid foods to reduce the pH to 4.6 or below
- Cold-pack pickles that are subjected to the action of acid-producing microorganisms but require the addition of acid or an acid food to achieve a pH of 4.6 or below
- Others

Determining whether the product you manufacture is an acidified food:
If you are unsure if the food you manufacture is an acidified food, contact a Process Authority to help make that determination. Acidified foods have specific regulations and requirements.

Steps to complete before starting a business manufacturing acidified foods:

- The operating supervisor who will oversee processing must receive training in pH controls and critical factors in acidification from an approved Better Process Control School.
- Find a commercial processing facility that meets the Minimum Construction Standards.
- Complete your registration with FDA to be in compliance with the Bioterrorism Act.
- Work with a Process Authority to validate and schedule your processes.
- Register as a Food Canning Establishment with FDA.
- File your scheduled process for each product with FDA.
- Contact the Division of Food Safety to schedule your initial inspection.
What records are required?

- **Examination Records** for raw materials, packaging materials, finished products and any other documentation to verify compliance with the regulations.

- **Processing Records** for each lot, batch or portion. These records contain identification data including product name, lot code, date and size. These records must also contain your measurements of the critical factors outlined in your scheduled process.

- **Deviation Records** for each instance that your critical measurements did not adhere to your scheduled process. These records must contain identification data such as the product name, quantity of product affected, how you handled the affected product and the actions taken to correct the process to prevent it from reoccurring.

- **Distribution Records** showing the initial distribution of each product you manufacture and calibration records that demonstrate the measurements taken are accurate.

Contact Us
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What regulations apply to acidified Foods?
All manufacturers must adhere to Good Manufacturing Practices (21 CFR 117). Additionally, if you are making an acidified food, you will be held to the standards outlined in the Code of Federal Regulations Title 21 Parts 108 and 114.

Why is pH control important when manufacturing acidified foods?
The regulations for acidified foods require pH controls for Clostridium Botulinum (Botulism). This organism grows in canned and vacuum packaged products and produces a very deadly neurotoxin that can cause paralysis and death if not treated.

What is a Process Authority?
A Process Authority is a recognized food safety expert that has the training, experience and access to the resources necessary to determine the appropriate processing conditions and critical factors to produce a commercially sterile food product. The regulations for acidified foods state that you must work with a Process Authority to determine an appropriate scheduled process for each product that you manufacture. After analyzing your ingredients and processing methods, a Process Authority will provide a document or “letter” that specifically outlines each critical factor. This document is used to file your scheduled process with the FDA and will also be used by the inspector during each inspection.

What should you expect during an inspection?
Inspections are a careful, critical, official examination. Your facility and equipment will be inspected to assess sanitation practices and your implementation of Good Manufacturing Practices. The inspector will observe processing activities of an acidified food to assess your adherence to the scheduled process that was filed with the FDA. A comprehensive review of the required records is necessary to determine compliance with the regulations. At the conclusion of the inspection, a report will be provided.