

How to Review Ingredients for Allergen Safety

Overview

It's impossible to have an allergen-free space without being fully confident in the ingredients you're using. The Certified Free From standards require that the participant have a policy and procedure in place for vetting all ingredients prior to ordering. This means a thorough investigation of each ingredient's allergen contents, and how it's manufactured.

Creating a Policy and Procedure

Every facility is different, so a one-size-fits-all approach to creating a policy and procedure does not work. The documents you create should take into consideration your own operations and which members from your team are involved in the process. The goal of the policy should always be ordering ingredients that align with your scope of certification, but how you get there is up to you.

When creating the policy and procedure, here are some examples of what to include:

- Which distributors you use, including local vendors
- Who approves the order of new ingredients (registered dietitian, trained manager or chef, etc.)
- How specification sheets are retrieved for each ingredient
- What information is deemed acceptable for your team (documented phone conversations, email correspondence, etc.)
- How often updated documentation is requested, and how that's tracked
- How documentation is stored, and who can access it
- How substitutions are handled



Gathering Documentation

When the CFF auditor is onsite, they will review your policy and procedure to see what you say you're doing for ingredient vetting. They'll then randomly select a handful of ingredients to ensure the policy and procedure have been followed. This could be checking for documentation gathered, including correspondence with manufacturers.

Every specification sheet will look a little different, some much more detailed than others. Sometimes manufacturers will provide additional information online, such as a FAQ section or supplemental allergen statement or chart. Any manufacturer-provided documentation that's gathered as part of your ingredient approval procedure should be filed physically or electronically and be easily accessible.

Sample Manufacturer Reach-Outs

"I have an allergen inquiry regarding Product Name (Product Number). Specifically I would like to know if it is free from peanuts, tree nuts and wheat. I would also like to know if there is any risk of cross contact with the previously mentioned allergens. If so, are there procedures in place to reduce this risk? Thank you for any additional information you can provide."

"The package for Product Name (Product Number) includes a statement that it's processed in the same facility as fish and shellfish. Can you please let me know if there is a risk for cross-contact between this product and those allergens?"

"Product Name (Product Number) has an allergy-friendly claim on the package. Could you please let me know more about this? Are there allergens present in your facility and, if so, do you conduct any testing to ensure there's no risk of cross-contact?"

Disclaimer: This document is for informational purposes only, and does not provide legally binding requirements. Certified Free From by MenuTrinfo participants are required to pass all standards, including those regarding ingredient approvals, in order to achieve certification. This information is being provided to all CFF participants, and while following the advice provided is strongly recommended, it does not guarantee an easier, faster, or cheaper audit.

