safe plates
BY NC STATE EXTENSION



Safe Plates for Farmers' Markets Sampling

Sampling at farmers' markets allows consumers to try a food before purchasing. Unsafe handling of time/temperature control for safety (TCS) foods, which require strict time and temperature control, can result in foodborne illness. Appropriate preparation methods for samples include: cleaning and sanitizing utensils and equipment, avoiding cross-contamination, avoiding temperature abuse, using good personal hygiene and selecting protective actions for samples.

Avoiding Temperature Abuse

- Heat TCS foods to the correct endpoint cooking temperature
- Keep hot TCS foods at 135°F or hotter
- Keep cold TCS foods at 41°F or colder
- Reheat TCS foods to 165°F
- Sample small amounts
- Discard TCS foods out of temp control after 4 hours
- Use a calibrated digital tip thermometer



Utensils and Equipment

- Choose durable, food grade materials that are easy to clean
- Store to prevent contamination
- Clean and sanitize appropriately before use

Food Preparation

- Wash hands thoroughly before preparing samples
- Keep raw and prepared food separate
- Clean and sanitize food contact surfaces before and after preparing samples
- Freshly prepare cut produce and keep chilled
- Never mix freshly cut produce with old
- Cut produce such as melon, leafy greens and tomatoes are TCS foods

Protective Actions

- Keep food six inches or more above the ground
- Cover samples to protect from insects, dust, etc.
- Monitor patrons to make sure they are only touching their sample

Sampling on a Hot Day

If it is 90°F or higher outside, discard TCS foods out of temp control after one hour.

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For more information contact ncsafeplates@ncsu.edu | Updated 10.20.26