

Introduction to Cottage Foods

Cottage Food Operators in California must specifically meet the following requirements:

- Register with the local Environmental Health Agency
- Only market cottage foods on the approved food list through either indirect and/or direct sales to consumers
- Complete a food processor training course
- Implement sanitary food preparation operations
- Create compliant labels
- Operate within established annual gross sales limit

Cottage Food Operators will also have to obtain approval from their local planning department, which might have other requirements.

Product Possibilities

Allowable vinegar products under the Cottage Food Law include:

- Processing wine or other alcohol products into vinegar
- Fermentation of fruits into vinegar by yeast fermentation and acetic acid fermentation
- Flavored vinegars with spices, fresh or dried herbs, fruits, or spices are **NOT** Allowed under the Cottage Food Law

Market Outlook

Cottage foods are niche products of particular interest to consumers desiring locally produced foods. Given this demand for local products, vinegar can fit a niche market as many consumers and chefs have come to value the variety of flavors that vinegars can add to foods and dishes.



Planning & Production

Sources for Product Ingredients (Raw Product)

California requires that all ingredients used in cottage foods must come from an “Approved Source.” Included in this are licensed commercial sellers, such as retailers and distributors. Farmers who are certified with their County Agricultural Commissioner can use their own commercially grown fruits, vegetables, nuts, herbs, and honey. Some counties have developed approved source programs for operators of community or culinary gardens who self-certify their management practices.

Types of Vinegars

Balsamic - is brown in color with a sweet-sour flavor. It is made from the white trebbiano or lambrusco grapes and aged in barrels of various woods. Some gourmet Balsamic vinegars are over 100 years old.

Champagne - has no bubbles. It's made from a dry white wine made from Chardonnay or Pinot Noir grapes (both of which are used to make Champagne).

Cider - is made from apples and is the most popular vinegar used for cooking in the United States.

Distilled - is made from distilled grain alcohol and is usually colorless. It is best used for pickling.

Malt - is made from fermented barley and grain mash, and flavored with woods such as beech or birch. It has a hearty flavor and is often served with fish and chips.

Planning & Production (cont'd)

Types of Vinegars (cont'd)

Rice - has been made by the Chinese for over 5,000 years. There are three kinds of rice wine vinegar: red which is used as a dip for foods and as a condiment in soups, white which is used mostly in sweet and sour dishes, and black which is common in stir-fries and dressings.

Sherry - is made from sherry wine aged under the full heat of the sun in wooden barrels and has a nutty-sweet taste.

Wine - can be made from white, red, or rose wine. These vinegars make the best salad dressings.

Processing

Vinegar can be produced by processing grapes, apples, pears or other fruits into vinegar via yeast fermentation and acetic acid fermentation. Wine vinegar can also be processed using red or white wine through acetic acid fermentation. Starter cultures can be purchased from a number of suppliers that will provide the “mother of vinegar” bacteria to initiate acetic acid fermentation.

Storage & Packaging

Vinegars should be stored tightly, well-sealed in a cool, dark location. If properly prepared and bottled, vinegars should keep for up to 6 months in cool storage. Always keep vinegar bottles tightly sealed.

Bottles: Glass bottles are available in many sizes, shapes and designs for packaging vinegar; marketing considerations may be relevant when selecting the container. Select and prepare containers first. Use only glass jars or bottles that are free of cracks or nicks and can be sealed with a screw-band lid, cap or cork.

Food Safety

Because vinegar is high in acid, it does not support the growth of *Clostridium botulinum* bacteria.

Marketing

Overview

All Cottage Food Operations must be registered or permitted by the local environmental health agency before starting business. Class A Cottage Food Operators may sell Vinegars at farmers markets, roadside stands, and Community Supported Agriculture programs directly to customers. Class B Cottage Food Operators may also sell to retailers. Class A Cottage Food Operators will get a higher price for each product, but will also incur higher marketing costs than when selling wholesale.

Labeling

All food made by a Cottage Food Operator must be labeled properly with an approved label which states “made in a home kitchen” in 12 point type, along with a descriptive name of the product, the contact information and location of the Cottage Food Operator, the permit/registration number, an ingredient list in descending order of weight, the net quantity in English units and metric units, and a declaration of food allergens.

Resources

Making Cider Vinegar at Home (Ohio State University)

https://ucfoodsafety.ucdavis.edu/sites/g/files/dgvnsk7366/files/inline-files/192135_0.pdf

Vinegar Making - Mississippi State University

http://silvalab.fsnhp.msstate.edu/vinegar_lactic.pdf

Vinegar Fermentation - Louisiana State University

https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2224&context=gradschool_theses



For more information on Cottage Foods visit:

<https://ucanr.edu/sites/cottagefoods/>