

## BACK DOOR SALES

### Are They Really Worth It?

All operators want to produce and sell food that is not only good but is safe as well. We all benefit from a safe food supply. One of the most important things you can do to ensure that the food you serve or sell is safe, is to purchase all of your foods and ingredients from approved suppliers. Not only is it a good idea – it is also the law under Section 11 of the *Food Premises Regulation*.

#### Foods from Approved Suppliers

Foods from approved suppliers are produced and/or processed under conditions that have been inspected for cleanliness and safety by a regulatory agency. The standards needed to ensure that the food is safe have been monitored. However, foods coming from unapproved suppliers may have been produced or processed under unsanitary conditions or, in the case of animals or fish, may also have been poached or have been harvested from closed areas. Foods coming from unapproved suppliers have a higher chance of being contaminated and have been responsible for many foodborne illness outbreaks.

#### Recommendations

For the retailer and restaurateur, here are some guidelines that should be followed to ensure purchases of foods and ingredients are only from approved suppliers:

- Never purchase dairy products unless they come from a licenced dairy plant. This includes many dairy products such as fluid milk products, goat's milk and cheese, ice cream, yogurt, sour cream, and all types of cheese. Dairy products can be especially risky because milk is an ideal growing medium for pathogens (disease causing

micro-organisms). Unless dairy products are processed in a licenced dairy plant, you have no assurance that they were processed under the sanitary conditions needed to ensure their safety.

- Seafood should be purchased only from reliable distributors who are established in the seafood business. Other things to look for include:
  - ✓ Shellstock must never be received unless accompanied by a fully completed processor's tag or other reliable evidence that it has been processed at a federally registered fish plant.
  - ✓ Finfish must come with a fish slip or receipt making reference to the fish slip. This document indicates the fisher's name, the species, etc.
  - ✓ Smoked fish must be prepared in an inspected processing plant. Improperly prepared smoked fish has caused cases of botulism in BC.
  - ✓ Only purchase shucked bivalves in fully labelled containers. All shucking and packaging of commercial product must be done at federally registered plants.



## BACK DOOR SALES - Are They Really Worth It?

- Meat products are particularly vulnerable to contamination if they are not processed under sanitary conditions. As such, always purchase meat products from approved suppliers.
- Never purchase home canned food products. Just as importantly, do not serve or sell your customers products that you have canned yourself – the risk is too great. If canned products are not properly heat processed, botulism toxin - a deadly poison - can form in the food.
- Never purchase eggs from unapproved suppliers. Eggs from unapproved suppliers are much more likely to contain *Salmonella enteritidis* (SE). Eggs from unapproved suppliers were linked to a large outbreak of SE that affected several hundred people in the Lower Mainland that started in 2007 and lasted until 2011. As recently as Spring 2014, poor quality eggs have been linked to new illnesses in BC.
- For all food products, here are some additional tips that may tell you the food or ingredients you are considering come from an approved supplier:
  - ✓ Beware of internet sales of food items from sites such as Craigslist and Kijiji.
  - ✓ Always make sure the food is properly packaged protecting it from outside contamination. Approved suppliers do not want anything to happen to the foods they supply to you.
  - ✓ The food container or box should be properly labelled identifying the food product and the manufacturer's name and address. Approved suppliers want you to know who they are and how to contact them. Suppliers that are not approved often don't want you to know where they can be found.
- ✓ If the food is meant to be refrigerated, make sure it is delivered to you at 4°C or less. Approved suppliers care about the quality of the food they deliver to you. Suppliers that are not approved are often not concerned about the quality or safety of the foods they sell.
- If you are not sure a supplier is approved, contact your local Environmental Health Officer (EHO). Your EHO can quickly find out if a supplier is approved or not.

### Conclusion

Approved food suppliers or manufacturers are in the same business you are in - to supply food that is not only good but safe as well. Backdoor salesmen are not particularly concerned about quality or safety and are there for one reason only - to make a quick sale. If there is a foodborne illness caused by the food the backdoor salesman sold you, the salesman will be long gone but it will be your establishment's name in the newspaper headline. While backdoor sales may save you a few dollars today, they might end up costing you your business tomorrow.

*Updated: Apr 2014*