

UC Cooperative Extension Cottage Foods

Tree Nuts



Market Outlook

The demand for local, nutritious nuts is high, in part because consumers are interested in the numerous health and nutritional benefits of nuts

- Almonds, pecans, pistachios, and walnuts have high levels of unsaturated fatty acids
- Extensive research on diet and health indicates that including these nuts in a diet low in saturated fat and cholesterol may protect against heart disease



Product Possibilities

Allowable nut products under the Cottage Food Law include:

- Chocolate-covered nuts
- Granola, cereals, and trail mixes containing nuts
- Nut mixes and nut butters



Planning & Production

Follow good hygienic practices when shelling and handling nuts:

- Wash hands with soap and water before and after handling nuts
- If you buy nuts in the shell, crack them in a clean area and into clean containers
- Store cracked nuts in clean, closed containers
- Washing nuts in the shell is not recommended because the extra moisture could encourage bacteria or mold growth



Food Safety

- Dry foods like nuts are not a common source of harmful bacteria. However, in recent years a number of dried foods have been associated with outbreaks of salmonellosis.
- The presence of harmful bacteria cannot be determined by sight, smell, taste, or texture.
- Refrigeration and freezing do not destroy these bacteria.



Food Safety

On account of two raw almond outbreaks, California almonds sold in retail stores must be treated in some way to reduce *Salmonella*.

Almond treatment options:

- Commercial blanching
- Commercial roasting
- Lighter steam or heat treatment
- Propylene oxide gas treatment

The health benefits, storage life, and flavor of nuts are not affected by these treatments.



Marketing

- Class A CFOs can sell these items at farmers markets, roadside stands, CSAs and direct to customers.
- Class B CFOs can also sell to retailers.
- Direct sales to consumers will generate greater revenues for the CFOs, but will also involve higher marketing costs.
- Selling indirect through retailers will earn a lower wholesale price-point but will require less of the CFO's time.



Labeling

- Cottage Food product labels must include:
 - The statement “Made in a Home Kitchen” in 12 point type
 - Descriptive name of the product
 - Contact information and location of the CFO
 - Permit/registration number
 - Ingredient list in descending order of weight
 - Net quantity in English units and metric units
 - Declaration of food allergens



Allergens

- Tree nuts are among the eight most common food allergens
 - Allergic reactions can include stomach and intestinal upset, skin irritations, sneezing, and shortness of breath
 - Some people experience a severe reaction called anaphylaxis. This is a life-threatening reaction that includes swelling of the throat, difficulty talking or breathing, vomiting, diarrhea, and/or a drop in blood pressure, which may result in unconsciousness
- There are two approved methods prescribed by federal law for declaring the food sources of allergens:
 - in a separate summary statement immediately following or adjacent to the ingredient list
 - within the ingredient list



Storage

- The length of time you can store nuts depends on the storage temperature and humidity.
- Storage life is shorter at room temperature than in a refrigerator or freezer
- Room temperature storage encourages insect growth and causes nut oils to become rancid quicker



Storage

- Nuts can maintain quality for up to a few months at room temperature, with shorter time in a warmer environment
- Rancid nuts are not unsafe but they have a sharp flavor that most people find unpleasant
- Nuts retain quality for a year or more at refrigerator temperature (40°F or below)



Storage

- Shelled nuts absorb moisture and external flavors, so they should be packed in moisture free and odor-tight packaging such as plastic or glass containers
- Storing nuts this way also reduces the risk of contamination by harmful bacteria.



Resources



- Consumer Knowledge and Handling of Tree Nuts: Food Safety Implications <http://ucce.ucdavis.edu/files/datastore/234-2518.pdf>
- Nuts: Safe Methods for Consumers to Handle, Store, and Enjoy <http://ucfoodsafety.ucdavis.edu/files/44384.pdf>
- El Dorado County Master Food Preservers – All About Nuts, publication #216 <http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.edu>



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