



“I learned everything I needed to know to create my product in a kitchen under food and safety laws.”

—Graduate of Acidified Foods School

Supporting a growing market niche: Providing small food businesses with training and science-based support

Wisconsin has a vibrant “buy local” economy and small food processors are benefiting from its momentum. Farmers wishing to add value to their crops and local entrepreneurs looking to meet customer demand are delving into the sale of canned pickles, salsas and other acidified food products.

The US Food and Drug Administration requires all manufacturers of acidified canned foods to receive training to help ensure food safety. To meet this requirement, each acidified food product must be manufactured under an approved and scientifically supported process.

Small artisanal manufacturers of acidified foods may face unique challenges in complying with these regulations. These businesses often have fewer than a dozen employees, may be family-run, and, in all likelihood, lack a staff scientist to support the process.

Not only do small businesses need support developing safe recipes—they also need help with product and process development to manufacture a high quality product that is properly packaged and labeled.

What UW-Extension is doing

To support small business owners, the University of Wisconsin-Extension developed an Acidified Foods School in 2009 targeted to the unique needs of the food entrepreneur. This program meets federal standards for training while also addressing the unique needs of small artisanal processors.

The entire package of support provided by UW-Extension offers not only training, but also assistance in recipe development and the approval process required to obtain a license. One-on-one help is also offered to each processor in navigating federal and state regulations that pertain to the products that they manufacture. Processors in Wisconsin now have unparalleled access to direct support and assistance in meeting their business objectives.

Since 2009, 595 small business owners and entrepreneurs have graduated from the Wisconsin Acidified Canned Foods School as they prepare to develop and market their products. The training has been offered a total of 36 times at UW-Extension county offices across the state, in partnership with the Division of Food and Recreational Safety for the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection. While the training focuses on meeting the needs of Wisconsin processors, its reach goes beyond state borders, also support-

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ing processors in neighboring states seeking to manufacture foods that meet safety standards.

Results of a survey of graduates attending the school between 2012 and 2016, coupled with feedback received through in-depth phone interviews of a sample of graduates, demonstrate that the Acidified Canned Foods School provides small businesses with training and ongoing science-based decision-making support needed to be successful in starting or expanding a business.

Outcomes

The Acidified Canned Foods School and follow-up support offered by UW-Extension were clearly important in providing a foundation for business success.

- More than 50% of graduates are currently processing acidified canned foods for sale under state license and another 34% are preparing to do so.
- **Business sales**—With an average of 60% of their sales coming from acidified canned food products, these business report substantial annual revenues:
 - 31% report sales of under \$5,000 per year.
 - 35% report sales between \$5,000 and \$25,000 per year.
 - 33% report over \$25,000 in annual sales.
- **Jobs**—These businesses contribute to economic development:
 - Graduates employ an average of 6 people.



Business owners overwhelmingly rated the Acidified Canned Food Training and follow-up support provided by UW-Extension as extremely important factors in being able to sell acidified canned foods today.

- *"The whole class was helpful in getting my business off the ground from proper canning technique to pH testing."*
- *"I learned EVERYTHING I needed to know to create my product in a kitchen under food and safety laws."*
- *"This training was awesome, it provided valuable information for a start-up business"*
- *"I learned everything I needed to know to safely and properly can acidified foods. I still refer to the training manual frequently."*
- *"What helped most was the guidelines on what needed to be done in order to license and sell your product."*

Along with providing needed training and one-on-one support, UW-Extension assists small food processors 24 hours a day with online and print-based materials. A website was developed by Extension specialists specifically to support processors of acidified foods. This website includes information on licensing and product testing, sample process forms, and contact information for process approval. It is available at https://foodsafety.wisc.edu/spp_acidified_canned_food.html

In addition, the UW-Extension Learning Store stocks publications with research-tested, approved recipes that can make it easier for processors to ready their product for market. These publications can be found at: learningstore.uwex.edu/Food-Preservation-and-Safety-C60.aspx.

To learn more

To learn more about UW-Extension's programs in support of small food processors, contact:

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