



License Exempt Food Processors and Cottage Food Operators Training

Required for submitting an exemption filing for manufactured and cottage food products in Vermont

July 2025

What has changed in Vermont food law?

[Act 42 \(2025\)](#) changes the requirements for claiming a Vermont Department of Health licensing exemption for certain types of small food processors.

On July 1, the Health Department adopted the [Manufactured Food Emergency Rule](#) to align with Act 42 (2025).

Food manufacturing establishments are required to immediately comply with the Emergency Rule while the Department conducts rulemaking to adopt a permanent rule.

What do I need to do to comply with the law?

Here are steps you can take now to make sure you are in compliance:

1. Review the guidance document to decide if you meet the requirements for a license exemption under the [Manufactured Food Emergency Rule](#).
2. Review this online training with information about the [Manufactured Food Emergency Rule](#) and food safety.
3. Label products for sale as required under the [Manufactured Food Emergency Rule](#).
4. File a Health Department exemption form after October 2025 and before the deadline of January 15, 2026.

Types of Food Processor License Exemptions

There are two types of licensing exemptions:

[Act 42 \(2025\)](#) provides a licensing exemption for food manufacturing establishments that:

- process and package food for resale, **and**
- have gross annual sales of less than \$10,000.00.

[Act 42 \(2025\)](#) provides a licensing exemption for cottage food operators that:

- produce or package cottage food products solely in the home kitchen of their private residential dwelling or in a kitchen on their personal property, **and**
- have annual gross receipts of \$30,000.00 or less from the sale of cottage food products.

What is a “Cottage Food Product”?

Cottage food products are defined in the rule as food sold by a cottage food operator that does not require refrigeration or time or temperature control for safety, including:

- non-potentially hazardous baked goods
- candy
- jams and jellies
- dry herbs
- trail mix
- granola
- cereal
- mixed nuts
- flavored vinegar
- popcorn
- coffee beans
- dry tea
- home-canned pickles, vegetables, or fruits with an equilibrium pH value of 4.6 or lower or a water activity value of 0.85 or less that are made using recipes approved by the [National Center for Home Food Preservation](#) or reviewed by a [food processing authority](#) for safety

What is time/temperature control for safety?

- Foods that require specific time and temperature controls for safety to limit pathogenic growth or toxin formation.
- This is based on the characteristics of the food including: pH (acidity), water activity, heat treatment, and type of packaging.
- These foods are particularly at risk for bacterial growth when held within the “temperature danger zone” between 41F and 135F.
- If you need to refrigerate the food to keep it safe, the food does **not** qualify for the cottage food exemption.

Cottage Food Products – Home Canning

Certain home-canned foods are allowed to be made in a cottage food operation that meet requirements for safety:

- Home-canned pickles, vegetables, or fruits with:
 - an equilibrium **pH of 4.6 or lower** (which means the food is acidic, making it more difficult for bacteria to grow), or
 - has a **water activity of 0.85 or below** (which means the food product is relatively dry or has a high sugar or salt content that binds up the water, making it more difficult for bacteria to grow).

These home-canned foods can be made by either using free food safe recipes from the [National Center for Home Food Preservation](#), or by having the product evaluated by a [process authority](#).

Process Authority Review

- A process review is a complete food safety evaluation of how a food product is made, including ingredients, all the steps of preparation, and packaging.
- A process review is conducted by a food processing authority. A food processing authority is a person who has expert knowledge of thermal processing requirements for low-acid foods packaged in hermetically sealed containers or has expert knowledge in the acidification and processing of acidified foods.
- If you want to use a special recipe for your home-canned cottage food product, you must have a process authority review completed to ensure it is safe.

Foodborne Illness Risk Factors

What is Foodborne Illness?

Foodborne illness is caused by consuming food or beverages that contain harmful pathogens or other contaminants.

They are microscopic organisms that can cause disease or illness, and can be viruses, bacteria, or parasites.

Common symptoms of foodborne illness:

- Most common are vomiting and/or diarrhea
- Others include: abdominal cramps, nausea, fever, joint/back aches and fatigue

Symptoms can appear within 30 minutes to 6 weeks after eating unsafe food.

Symptoms typically last 1-7 days.

What practices cause most foodborne illness?

- Sick food workers (1 out of 3 outbreaks are linked to infected food handlers!)
- Touching food with dirty hands
- Food not kept sufficiently hot or cold
- Contaminated ingredients or food
- Using contaminated equipment that isn't cleaned and sanitized properly

Dangers of preparing food when sick

- You can transfer your illness to others through the food you prepare.
- Most foodborne illness outbreaks have been caused by people who prepared food when they were sick.
- Norovirus is a virus easily transmitted, and the most common cause of short-term diarrhea and vomiting.

Safe Food Handling Practices

Keep it clean

To prevent food contamination:

- Wash hands often and well.
- Do not touch ready-to eat foods with bare hands – use gloves, tongs, spatula, etc.
- Change gloves when soiled or switching tasks.
- Use clean clothes or aprons.
- Maintain short clean fingernails.
- Cover cuts.
- Limit jewelry on hands.
- Restrain loose hair (cover or tie back).



Handwashing Steps – wash hands often and well



Use soap and
warm water



Scrub for 20
seconds



Rinse off
soap



Dry with a
paper towel

Glove use

- Gloves are not a substitute for handwashing.
- Disposable gloves can spread germs like unwashed hands.
- Use gloves for a single task – do not reuse gloves.
- Wash hands before putting on a new pair of gloves.
- Change gloves when they are damaged, soiled, or changing tasks.

Protect your food from contamination

During storage and transport:

- Keep food wrapped or in a covered container.
- Set food in a clean, dry container for transport.
- Store food off the floor or ground.
- Keep away from potential sources of contamination such as plumbing and chemicals.

During display:

- Keep food covered, wrapped or sealed in packaging.
- Do not handle with bare hands; use utensils or disposable gloves.
- Store food off the floor or ground.

Cleaning and Sanitizing

Clean and sanitize sinks, equipment, utensils, tables, and counter tops before, during and after food preparation.

1. Wash with warm soapy water.
2. Rinse with clean water.
3. Apply a sanitizer safe for food contact surfaces.
4. Air dry equipment and surfaces.



Don't let your pets help prepare food

Keep pets out of the food preparation area while preparing foods in a home kitchen.

If pets come into the area, clean and sanitize food preparation surfaces.



Packaging and Labeling

- Package your food in a clean, dry place to protect it from contamination.
- Remember not to touch food with bare hands.
- Nutrition and health claims are regulated under Title 21, Part 101 of the Code of Federal Regulations and require nutritional analysis:
 - Nutrition claims such as “fat free” or “low sodium”
 - Health claims such as “prevents heart disease”

Label All Exempt Food Products

Packaged food made under the license exemption must be labeled with:

- Name and address of your operation
- Name of the food product
- Ingredients in descending order of predominance by weight
- Major allergen information for ingredients:
 - Eggs, milk, wheat, tree nuts, peanuts, soy, fish, crustacean shellfish, sesame
- Net weight or net volume
- Statement **“Made in a home kitchen not inspected by the Vermont Department of Health”**

Thank you!

Your training is complete.

Thanks to MN Department of Agriculture for training content.