

# IDDBA Focus on Allergens

## *Food Allergen Safety Information for the Retail Industry*

Retail customers with food allergies put their trust in you and your team to source safe food. One in every 25 people that shop supermarkets either have a food allergy or are shopping for someone who does. Additionally, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report a 50% increase in food allergies among children between 1997 and 2011. How are you applying allergen-friendly standards to improve customer engagement and sell more?



Focus on Allergens

### **A Culture of Customer Service**

- Commitment to developing allergen-friendly customer services starts at the C-suite.
- Designate a person to lead the communication process. This person will lead a team that answers customers' questions, conducts research, controls internal and external communications, develops product, and oversees employee training. Where is your business in this process? Ask yourself:
  - Do you take care of shoppers with food allergies?
  - Do you have a process for handling food-allergy requests?
  - Do you have special food items or a menu for people with special diets?
  - Do you source allergen-friendly foods and market them?
  - Do you know what are the top eight food allergens?

### **Everyone Sharing The Same Message**

#### **Develop easy to understand messages for your employees like:**

- If a customer tells you they have allergies or someone in their family has a food allergy, notify your manager or trained in-store food allergen specialist.
- Always refer to the food label or manufacturer information if there are questions about ingredients. **Let the customer decide whether to purchase the product.**
- Always take food allergy requests seriously.
- Avoid cross contact. Do not use common cooking equipment like fryers, grills, and griddles.

#### **Develop easy to understand messages for your customers like:**

- Always ask for a manager or trained in-store food allergen specialist upon arrival at the deli, bakery, cheese counter or supermarket foodservice areas.
- Ask for food labels or manufacturer information if you have a question about ingredients. You're the decision maker.
- Bring a list of foods you can eat to help supermarket chefs decide on the best options for your meal.

#### **Websites should contain:**

- Whom to contact with dietary questions.
- Dietary forms like dietary request letters, product information sheets, and dietary data sheets.
- Allergen-friendly products your fresh departments and foodservice restaurants and food bars sell.

## Commit to Safe Food Allergen Practices

- Have a designated, trained food allergen specialist, department manager and/or chef to train new employees and to help customers with their questions and purchases.
- Practice the Four R's program from Food Allergy Research & Education (FARE) (on page 3 and at <http://www.foodallergy.org/file/restaurant-poster-lowres-faan.pdf>)
- Implement HACCP and designate a "food allergen safety zone" in kitchens and commissaries. All utensils, knives, and small cookware should have the same colored handles and surfaces to easily identify them as allergen-free items.
- Avoid cross contact and understand where it can occur. Are you effectively using dedicated utensils, cutting boards, pots and pans, and grills? Heat does not destroy food allergens.
- Use a closed-door tram to keep special dietary products and equipment separate.
- Train team members with free allergen safety programs at [iddba.org](http://iddba.org) and [foodallergy.org](http://foodallergy.org).
- Ingredient transparency is very important. Ensure that cooks prepare fresh foods using the appropriate ingredients and follow cooking instructions correctly to eliminate the chance of cross contact of allergen ingredients not in the recipe. Also, provide a proper ingredient statement for each food item.



## Ask What Products Are Used At Home

- Ask shoppers what foods he or she usually eats at home. Knowing what they usually eat will make it easier to suggest a menu item that can be eaten or prepared for them safely. **Let the customer decide whether to purchase the product.**
- "Keep the food simple, to keep the guest safe."

## Engage Customers With Open Communication

- Seek feedback from shoppers with food allergies. Keep an open line of communication going with them through social sites, surveys, and focus groups. Start support groups.
- Ask customers for their phone number to contact them after their purchase. This will let them know you are genuinely concerned about their experience.
- Use sampling programs and cooking demonstrations to encourage the sales of your allergen-friendly fresh foods.

For more information on IDDBA's **Safe Food Matters! Focus on Allergens** go to [iddba.org](http://iddba.org). Follow Chef Joel Schaefer: **Twitter @Allergycheffsinc, Facebook: Allergy Chefs Inc.** Find more allergy education at FARE, [foodallergy.org](http://foodallergy.org)

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IDDBA Retail Management Forum, Pasadena, CA, March 5-6, 2016. 608.310.5000. [iddba.org](http://iddba.org) and [training.iddba.org](http://training.iddba.org)

