Selling Safe Canned Foods
by Janet Hackert, Regional Health and Nutrition Specialist

Ever think about canning and selling that delicious salsa recipe? Or wonder if the jar of pickled beets sold on the counter at a favorite diner is safe? There are steps that must be taken to make sure the consumer gets a safe product.

The main concern with canned food is any microorganism that may be present in the food before preserving it. With canned produce, the most likely culprit would be Clostridium botulinum which causes botulism. It forms spores that create a deadly toxin. The perfect environment for developing a hearty crop of this microorganism is the same environment as is present in a sealed jar of food. In fact, Londa Nwadike, University of Missouri/Kansas State University Extension Food Safety Specialist, reports that, “only a few nanograms can cause paralysis and death.” In an incident reported in the spring of 2015, one woman died and 21 others were sick with botulism, mostly likely originating from improperly home-canned food served at a potluck. Therefore it is essential to destroy the microorganisms before the jar is sealed.

What process is required to safely can produce depends on what the food is and how it is prepared. MU Extension has a series of guides called Quality for Keeps that describes these processes for home food preservation.

When it comes to selling canned products, what is required to insure a safe product depends on the acid and sugar levels and whether the product is refrigerated or not. In order to sell these products, the seller may need to follow some or all of a number of steps which may include producing the product in an inspected kitchen, going through a process review, keeping pH records for the process, monitoring water activity measurements, using a commercial retort for canning, monitoring refrigerator temperatures, or other steps, depending on what the product is. The person responsible for the process may have to attend Better Process Control School as well.

University of Missouri Extension has two handouts that may be helpful for someone starting up a business to sell canned goods: Regulations for Selling Safe Canned Foods in Missouri and Food Labeling for Missouri Food Producers and Processors. These can be found at http://missourifamilies.org/foodsafety/newsletters/. MU Extension also has Business Development Specialists who can help with the business side of selling these items.

For more information on selling safe canned foods contact Dr. Nwadike directly at 816-482-5850 or nwadikel@missouri.edu. Or for more information on this or any other topic, contact me, Janet Hackert, at 660-425-6434 or HackertJ@missouri.edu or your local University of Missouri Extension office.

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