



## THE IMPORTANCE OF CHOOSING THE RIGHT SUPPLIER

Whether its ingredients or other components for a product, packaging, chemicals, or a service provider, choosing the right supplier will help to maintain the quality for customers. Here are some things to keep in mind when looking to source suppliers:

- Know the end goal. Looking to purchase from local, organic certified companies, or is cost an important or limiting factor? Looking for convenience, sustainability, environmentally friendly? Know the wants before looking for the needs.
- The suppliers must know the importance of and have allergen awareness.
- If a company is scaling up and has typically used products from the grocery or another retail store in the past, it's important to be aware that as the company grows, this will become a limiting factor. It may become difficult to get information from suppliers for these products. Products may need to be reformulated or have new labels made. If an organization decides or is required by a retailer to undergo a third-party audit, proof that the suppliers are approved and that they don't pose a risk to the products will be required.
- Notice must come from suppliers if they make any changes to their products (e.g. allergens added or removed, different ingredients/materials used) to ensure a product remains consistent and compliant.
- Sometimes value doesn't always mean a good price; it could mean quality product and customer service. A cheap product may shorten shelf-life, be difficult to run on equipment, be prone to shortages or ultimately not do the job it needs to do properly. However, a slightly more costly ingredient may have amazing quality and customer service and support attached to it, which could save problems in the long run, such as a recall.
- Consider if a potential supplier had any recalls or was involved in any food fraud incidents. Food fraud is when someone intentionally substitutes, tampers or misrepresents a food, ingredients or packaging or makes false claims about a product.
- A supplier should have a recall and traceability program.
- Keep a register or list of trusted "approved" suppliers and their contact information as well as what they supply. This reference list will come in handy should a supplier need to be contacted quickly or someone else needs to put in an order.
- Having an alternate supplier available is important in the event that a current supplier does not have the ingredients or packaging on hand.

## WHAT DOES “APPROVED SUPPLIER” MEAN?

An approved supplier is a trusted supplier of goods and/or services that have been evaluated and determined to supply safe, quality products or services. This trust is based on historical relationships and evaluated through documentation, references, and/or samples before purchasing or securing a contract. Ingredient specifications need to be on file for service contracts. Typically these evaluations are done by a team or a few key individuals at a farm or facility.

Depending on the size of the operation, the approved supplier team may include a purchasing representative, quality/food safety representative, production/receiving/maintenance/sanitation representative, if appropriate, and a member of the management team that is involved in approvals. In some cases, two people may fill all of these roles. The important part is that there is a cross-functional team and that evaluation is not only based on cost. Having input from those that use the product is key to getting the whole picture before and after a supplier is approved. They can supply valuable experience in using the product or dealing with the supplier, and any issues that they have come across that may affect decisions moving forward with a particular supplier.

Anyone that has a service contract with an organization such as pest control, laundry, refrigeration, transport, storage, or maintenance should also be looked at and listed on an approved supplier list. Having the same consistent, quality service with providers that know what is expected of them when they enter a farm or facility or when a product enters their facility will ensure products reflect the same consistency and quality.

## HAVING TROUBLE GETTING THE REQUIRED INFORMATION FROM A SUPPLIER?

More often, suppliers are asked for documents such as, but not limited to, signed letters of conformity or guarantee, or multiple requests to fill out lengthy forms, supply proof of second or third-party audits, specifications, certificates of analysis, etc. When receiving third-party certificates, confirm by looking at the site directories to ensure authenticity. Try to be patient; other clients may also be looking for information from them. Follow up after a few weeks with a phone call or email. Perhaps they needed to request the information from another department or head office, or maybe they are a small supplier and do not understand the request. Cooperating with a supplier will strengthen the relationship and might provide better customer service in the long run.

Having trusted suppliers and service providers will ensure that the company continues to meet any regulatory or customer requirements and that products are produced, processed, and packed in a safe environment for customers.

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## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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