

January 2011 – Tip of the Week

Understanding Food Allergies

A food allergy is the body's immune systems response to a protein in a food. Reactions can be deadly, so it is important for foodservice employees to be aware of clients with food allergies and to have a plan for preventing reactions from occurring. Foodservice personnel need to know how to identify potential allergens on food labels, recognize symptoms of a reaction, and know what to do if a customer has a reaction.

There are 8 common food allergens that foodservice employees need to be aware of. They include: Milk, Egg, Peanuts, Tree Nuts, Soybean, Wheat, Shellfish, and Fish. These foods cause more than 90% of all allergic reactions.

For more information on food allergies and what foodservice employees need to know, contact the Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Network at <http://www.foodallergy.org>. Cash-Wa Distributing has a new publication "Product Allergen & Kosher Information". Ask your sales representative for a copy.

Whole Grain Recommendations

The 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend that all adults eat at least three servings (equivalent to 3 ounces) of whole grain products per day. The reality is that most Americans are not reaching this goal. According to the National Health & Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES), 35% of Americans age 12 and over consumed enough total grains to meet the recommended amounts and only 4% met the current whole grain recommendation.

The Whole Grains Council adopted the following definition of whole grains in 2004. "Whole grains or foods made from them contain all the essential parts and naturally occurring nutrients of the entire grain seed. If the grain has been processed (e.g., cracked, crushed, rolled, extruded, and/or cooked), the food product should deliver approximately the same rich balance of nutrients that are found in the original grain seed."

For more information about whole grains, log on to the Whole Grains Council website at <http://www.wholegrainscouncil.org>.

Ethylene Gas and Produce Ripening

Ethylene is a naturally occurring gas which ripens fruits and vegetables. Some fruits and vegetables produce ethylene as they ripen. Without it, they would never fully ripen. Ethylene producing produce includes: apples, apricots, avocados, bananas, cantaloupe, honeydew, kiwi fruit, mango, nectarines, peaches, pears, plums, and tomatoes.

Some fruits and vegetables are ethylene sensitive. Apples and asparagus will age more quickly if exposed to ethylene. Bananas, cucumbers, and broccoli turn yellow in the presence of ethylene. Cut flowers, egg plant, green beans, and leafy greens can lose their color when exposed to ethylene. Potatoes, soft-shell squash, and watermelon turn soft in the presence of ethylene.

To avoid the undesirable effects of ethylene, keep sensitive fruits and vegetables away from ethylene producing ones.

Source: Quality Food For Quality Meals (USDA)

Spice Storage Hints

Proper handling and storage will increase spice shelf life and protect flavor. Here are some hints for proper storage and handling of spices and herbs:

- Keep spices and herbs cool and dry. Temperatures below 68°F and below 60% relative humidity are needed for maximum shelf life. Do not store spices near the range or dishroom. Cold storage (32°F to 45°F) is recommended for capsicums (paprika, red pepper, and chili powder) and spices containing volatile oils and/or characteristic odors (such as allspice, cloves, parsley flakes, dill, marjoram, and cumin).
- Light sensitive spices such as paprika, parsley, chives, and other green herbs need to be protected against direct exposure to sunlight and fluorescent lights.
- Teach your staff to handle spices and herbs properly. Close containers quickly after use. Use dry utensils to measure spices and keep them away from steam.

Source: American Spice Trade Association