

ODDS & ENDS

FSA advice on food preparation for volunteers and charity groups

For information

Members will no doubt recall the Great Jam-Jar Controversy when we (and, it should be said, the National Federation of Women's Institutes) concluded that the EU Framework Regulation on food contact materials appeared to prohibit the reuse of jam-jars for items such as jams and pickles offered for sale or awarded as prizes. The position of the Food Standards Agency appeared to be equivocal; however, after considerable media comment, the conclusion was reached that, whatever the EU law on the matter, no local authority would enforce it in the case of a church fête or charity summer fair – and there the matter rests.

The Food Standards Agency has now published [Community and charity food provision - guidance on the application of EU food hygiene law](#). The guidance offers two examples which will be of particular interest to members where the FSA suggests that food provision is unlikely to require registration.

- *A one-off event such as a church or school fete, or a street party.* Is deemed not to have 'continuity'. However, organisers of large community events are advised to contact the local authority for practical advice. Where several large events might be organised within a year, especially with complex food safety controls, then a 'degree of organisation' could be involved.
- *Daily small-scale provision of low-risk foods by community / charity volunteers.* Is not deemed to have a 'degree of organisation' as it is low-risk and small-scale provision. However, does have continuity and registration would be required if complex food safety controls are required or high-risk foods were served or if food is served to vulnerable persons.

The FSA has also posted on its website a series of more user-friendly FAQs on food preparation at charity events. Since it is quite difficult to locate, here it is in full:

"Questions and answers for volunteers and charity groups

I'm making food for lots of people at a fundraiser event. What general advice can you give me?

When you're making food for large numbers of people, it's important to keep food safe. Here are some general practical tips:

- plan ahead - if you can prepare food in advance, this should make things easier later
- wash your hands and any equipment you are using in hot soapy water

- keep food out of the fridge for the shortest time possible
- even if people are waiting to eat, don't reduce cooking times
- always make sure food is properly cooked before you serve it
- keep raw and ready-to-eat foods apart
- do not use food past its 'use by' date
- know what is in the ingredients so information about allergens can be provided (e.g. provide a 'contains nuts' label for cakes)

Which people are particularly vulnerable?

If food is being provided to vulnerable people – this can include the elderly, infants under five years of age, expectant mums and anyone with a serious or long-term medical condition – you should take particular care to ensure the food is safe. The advice here will be helpful and the FSA also recommends contacting the local authority, who can provide free advice.

Is it okay to sell homemade cakes at the school fair?

There is no rule banning the sale of homemade cakes at school fetes or other community events. Homemade cakes should be safe to eat, as long as the people who make them follow good food hygiene advice and the cakes are stored and transported safely.

At home, people making cakes should follow these tips:

- always wash your hands before preparing food
- make sure that surfaces, bowls, utensils, and any other equipment is clean
- don't use raw eggs in anything that won't be thoroughly cooked, such as icing or mousse
- keep cheesecakes and any cakes or desserts containing cream or butter icing in the fridge
- store cakes in a clean, sealable container, away from raw foods, especially raw meat

On the day, people bringing in cakes from home or running the stall should follow these tips:

- transport cakes in a clean, sealable container
- wash their hands as frequently as possible
- make sure that cheesecake and any cakes or desserts containing cream or butter icing are left out of the fridge for the shortest time possible
- when handling cakes use tongs or a cake slice instead

How long can I leave food out on a buffet?

In general, food that needs to be chilled, such as sandwich fillings, should be left out of the fridge for the shortest time possible. If it is left at room temperature for a long time, bacteria can grow or toxins can form, and both of these could cause food poisoning.

If you are preparing a buffet, you should try to keep food out for a short time and not more than four hours. After this time, any remaining food should be thrown away or put back in the fridge but if you do put the food back in the fridge, don't let it stand around at room temperature if you serve it again."

Reusing jam-jars

The guidance makes no mention of the vexed issue of reusing jam-jars. *However*, the FSA's current view seems to be what its Chief Executive wrote in her [Report to the FSA Board in November 2012](#).

"8. Reuse of jam jars

8.1. There have also been recent reports in the media claiming that the FSA / EU had banned the re-use of jam jars and that this would adversely impact on charities and voluntary events. This is incorrect. An individual can reuse jam jars for occasional events. In doing so, they obviously need to ensure proper sterilisation and good hygiene in preparation.

8.2. If you are a food business using glass, plastic, foil etc. for food storage then there are, quite reasonably, EU rules about ensuring any chemicals in the container don't pass into the food at levels that are a danger to health. There is no evidence that the re-use of jam jars poses any risk of this occurring. It is for local authorities to determine what constitutes a food business. They can advise those involved in preparing food on a charitable basis. It would seem that local enforcement authorities have been applying a common sense approach to this issue for a number of years in discussion with local organisations and we are not aware of any prosecutions. The FSA supports this common sense approach to enforcing this legislation."

That would appear to be definitive.

[Source: *Food Standards Agency* – 31 July 2013]