



# COVID-19: Tips as You Consider Adding Food to Your Retail Business

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Many businesses are experiencing changes in how they operate, and what they sell, as a result of the Coronavirus. One of those changes that retailers are frequently considering is to offer food and beverages along with their regular product line - to entice shoppers to remain a little longer, or in response to consumers' desire to make fewer stops while taking care of more tasks on their errands. There are certain unique aspects related to food sales that need to be considered before adding food to the retail store "mix."

## Step 1: Confirm Market Demand

To be successful in selling food, a merchant needs to create a credible link between the storefront and food service. Think about how new items were added to the store in the past. Likely, customers began inquiring about certain items for which they were looking, often having made a logical mental connection with the current inventory.

It will be important to verbalize to customers clearly why new items are being added - whether by "popular demand," or to offer convenience, or enhance the shopping experience. This requires the retailer to explore reasons why customers would be likely to buy food and drink, and articulate the benefits of purchasing a snack or meal at the store.

### Quick Tip

Some people find that a Value Proposition Canvas is a handy tool to use, when shifting mindset from "how this change will benefit the business" to "what the customer will value." This quick tool provides a visual of what customers want, need, and fears - and how they link with the benefits, features and experience the business will offer via food sales. When the reasons why the new products will be valued are firmly in mind, it is easier to use them for marketing messages.

[Click here for a quick tutorial and access to a blank canvas.](#)

## Step 2: Pick What Will Be Sold

There are several different lines of products that might be offered to customers. No matter what type of food is chosen, a retail food establishment registration/license will be needed, but with more complexity, there will be greater cost of entry:

- *Pre-packaged beverages and snack packages (bought wholesale, sold retail)* - These are the least complicated as new products, because the manufacturer will have responsibility for food safety issues; the retail store simply needs to store, display, and sell.
- *Simple refreshments such as coffee, tea, and pre-made items such as cookies, muffins, etc.* - a coffee pot and seating area might be needed, but generally these products will present few food safety challenges because they are basic and shelf-stable.
- *Store-made foods and beverages* - additional staff (potentially a barista or cook) will be needed, as well as designation and equipping of kitchen space. If not set up as grab-and-go, seating areas will be needed. Sometimes, this advanced level of food service is managed by collaborating with a second business owner who manages this small "restaurant" within the store.

### Step 3: Learn the Rules

All food businesses, including retail businesses like yours that offer food and beverages, are inspected by a sanitarian to ensure that the food meets the PA Food Law. However, it is a little bit challenging to know just who will inspect a new food enterprise, because not all retail food sales are under the jurisdiction of the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture. Some Pennsylvania municipalities have their own department of health that will inspect and license food retailers within their jurisdiction. To confirm who has jurisdiction at a specific address, [click here to use the Local Health Departments by County sheet](#).

Since Pennsylvania Food Law is the benchmark for retail food establishments, a great deal of useful information is found by visiting this [PDA Retail Food Facilities and Restaurants page](#).

Many of the resources on this site will provide a good overview of product selection, facility requirements, and personnel capacity needed to legally and safely start selling food.



**Developing a good working relationship with the sanitarian is very important, as this expert will know what is required, nice or not necessary to start the food enterprise. Contacting the sanitarian early in the planning process will save money, time and energy - making the addition of food as seamless as possible.**

In many cases, the sanitarian will recommend training in safe food practices. The most common way to receive this training is through the National Restaurant Association ServSafe® Course, [www.servsafe.com](http://www.servsafe.com). The certification is a two-part process, which begins with a classroom (or online) session and is completed by accomplishing a passing score on a proctored test.

### Step 4: Update an Existing Business Plan, or Develop a Business Model Canvas Specific to Food Service

Although “adding a few things to eat” may not seem like a big change in a retail store, it does change the “atmosphere” for customers and often will involve investment of time and money. Renewing the mission statement to incorporate this facet of the business, planning to provide staff training, considering updated promotional methods, and factoring in new categories of revenue and expense in the cash flow budget will ensure that food service meshes with the rest of the business - and support investments and loans that may be needed to bring the vision to reality.



#### We Can Help!

**Contact us today to set up a time to discuss your small business needs.**

- Current SBDC Clients may reach out to their SBDC Business Consultant.
- New requests for for-profit small business assistance can visit [www.scrantonsbdc.com](http://www.scrantonsbdc.com) and choose “Already in Business.”
- For more information: e-mail [sbdc@scranton.edu](mailto:sbdc@scranton.edu) or call 570-941-7588

**We also have interns available to help your existing business, supported by CARES Act Funding.**

**The PA SBDC Agriculture Center of Excellence is a joint initiative of The University of Scranton SBDC, Clarion University SBDC, and Penn State SBDC and is designed to help Pennsylvania agriculture businesses sustain operations and stabilize food supply chains in the wake of the pandemic.**

**For more information on this initiative, [visit our website](#).**