

A Process Authority is an expert with the technical knowledge, training, and experience needed to evaluate and approve your recipe/formulation and process, ensuring that the final product is safe.

If you are a food processor that intends to make shelf-stable acid/acidified products, such as sauces and pickles, you are required to contact a Process Authority to review the recipe/formulation, processing steps, and containers/closures for the product. The Process Authority will then ensure that the product you want to process achieves parameters to produce a safe and quality product.

Scheduled Process

A scheduled process is a documentation of the recipe, processing steps with time and temperature parameters, and information about containers/closures for the product. If any information is missing or safety cannot be assured, the process authority will help modify or refine the process until it meets regulatory and safety requirements.

Once a Process Authority has all the information that they need from you, it may take 4 to 6 weeks to return a Scheduled Process to you. Be aware that when making multiple flavors of a similar product, such as mild and medium salsa, the ingredients may differ enough to require two separate scheduled processes.

If you change any part of the original formula, packaging materials, or package size, it is important to consult the process authority for a new scheduled process.

A Process Authority will also assist in completing the FDA Food Process Filing for Acidified Method (Form FDA 2541e). The form requires detailed information such as product name, formulation, pH, container/closure system, and processing parameters. The Process Authority provides a detailed letter with this information, which the processor can use to accurately complete and submit Form 2541e.”

To find a process authority, visit the Association of Food and Drug Officials (AFDO) directory of approved Process Authorities.



What is AFDO?

The Association of Food and Drug Officials (AFDO) is a non-profit organization in the United States that brings together members from federal, state, and local regulatory agencies, along with professionals from industry and academia. Its goal is to promote uniform enforcement of food, drug, medical device, and consumer product safety regulations. AFDO maintains a list of recognized Process Authorities.

To access the AFDO directory of approved Process Authorities, visit afdo.org/directories/fpa/. There is a map and a list of available Process Authorities in states and territories. Select the specific state or territory to show the names and details of the process authority(ies) for that state. The details provided will include the name of the process authority, organization, contact information, and the food type and food process they specialize in.

What can a Process Authority help you with?

A process authority can help you if you are manufacturing shelf-stable acid, formulated acidified, acidified, and

low-acid foods. The following definitions will help you determine which category your product falls into:

Acid foods: Foods that have a natural pH of 4.6 or below before processing. Examples include cherries and citrus fruits.

Acidified Foods: These are low-acid foods (pH above 4.6) to which acids or acidic ingredients are added to lower the finished equilibrium pH to 4.6 or below, with a water activity (a_w) greater than 0.85. Examples include pickled vegetables, some salsas, and sauces. Acidified foods require proper processing and regulatory controls to prevent bacterial growth, especially *Clostridium botulinum*.

Formulated Acid Foods: Foods comprised mostly of acidic ingredients to which a small amount (<10% by weight) of low-acid ingredients are added, so the pH does not deviate significantly from the original acid food. Examples: Some BBQ sauces and salad dressings.

Low-Acid Foods: Foods with finished equilibrium pH greater than 4.6 and water activity greater than 0.85, such as most vegetables and meats. These require thermal processing for safety to prevent the growth of *Clostridium botulinum*.

These definitions align with FDA regulations under 21 CFR Part 114 for acidified foods and 21 CFR Part 113 for low-acid canned foods.



Product testing: The Process Authority may have a laboratory to test your product or may refer you to a commercial food testing laboratory. Generally, your food product will be tested for pH and water activity. Microbial testing could also be done if needed.

Shelf-life: A Scheduled Process does not determine the shelf-life of the food product. It is accepted that acid and acidified canned foods (pH less than 4.6) will maintain their best quality for 18 months. An adequate “best by” date for these products after packaging would be 18 months.

What is the cost for a scheduled process?

A standard cost is \$150 and \$300/product, for Kansas and Non-Kansas residents, respectively, at the Kansas Value Added Foods Lab, and this generally includes some product testing. It is important to ask the Process Authority or lab about pricing.

The Kansas Value Added Foods Lab works directly with a process authority and requires sending product samples for testing. Specifically, two samples from three different batches are needed (six total). For more information on KVAFL fees and client paperwork visit: extension.k-state.edu/kvaf/fees-information/

Training: To manufacture acidified foods, you will need to complete required training. For shelf-stable canned or jarred products, below is the Canned Foods Manufacturing School or the Better Process Control School – Acidified. Attending a training does not qualify you to serve as your own Process Authority.

Some approved training options:

- Acidified Foods Manufacturing School – \$400 (100% online) North Carolina State University, foodbusiness.ces.ncsu.edu/acidified-foods-manufacturing-school/
- Better process control school- \$300 (100% online) University of Tennessee; foodscience.tennessee.edu/better-process-control-school-course/
- Consumer Brands Association, a national food industry group, prepares a list each year of some of the trainings that are available to food businesses, consumerbrandsassociation.org/.

Checklist for working with a Process Authority

- Provide a clear description of your product. For example: dill pickles that are spears or sliced.
- Provide accurate ingredient measurements by precisely weighing all the ingredients.
- Provide size and type of the container and lid, such as 8-ounce glass jar with a one-piece metal lid with a safety button.
- Provide procedures for cleaning and sanitizing jars and lids before use.
- Provide temperature records:
 - Document the initial temperature of raw ingredients.
 - Note the temperature of liquid or brine.
 - Track temperatures during the cooking, filling, and holding process.
 - Record cooling temperatures, especially when using plastic containers.
- Provide a timeline, detailing how long the product stays at each temperature.
- Provide headspace measurements, recorded accurately in inches, such as ¼" (inches).
- Provide clear and detailed information of the processing steps to help in efficiently reviewing the recipe.
- Have openness to suggestions and be ready to make adjustments if there are safety concerns.
- Have clear communication and follow through all steps to prevent delays and ensure a successful product review.

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