

Food safety testing: When to consider outsourcing.

You may be asking yourself if it would be better to keep your food safety lab in-house or if it's time to start outsourcing your testing.

There isn't one simple answer to this dilemma, except a classic "it depends." It depends on the test volume. It depends on the costs associated with executing the tests required. It depends on the staffing resources available to conduct the testing. It depends on the proximity of a potential contract lab partner, and the time sensitivity to have a result.

Volume:

A common case for outsourcing is when there is a consistently low need to conduct a certain method, making the investment of the time and materials required to execute internally unjustifiable. For example, if your internal lab conducts fewer Lactic Acid Bacteria (LAB) tests per month than the number of plates in the smallest package of 3M™ Petrifilm™ Lactic Acid Bacteria Count Plates, it might make sense to ask your contract lab to conduct the method at their lab instead. A package of 3M™ Petrifilm™ Plates can last up to a month in the freezer once opened, and 18 months unopened.

Time to result:

Some contract labs have developed sophisticated logistics networks so

the time to receive your samples from the plant to the contract lab is as speedy as possible. However, it will still inevitably take longer to travel to a contract lab than if the sample was collected in your plant and walked over to the internal lab on the same property. Time-to-result is critical in many cases. 3M Food Safety has developed rapid quality indicator methods and rapid pathogen methods that can be completed in-house or at a contract lab. Get more information about 3M Food Safety's [rapid methods](#).

Employment challenges:

With increased regulatory emphasis and consumer interest in food safety, the demand for qualified laboratory technicians is rising. Combined with a high-performing economy and low unemployment rates, finding the right employees can be difficult. Managing

an internal lab through turnover, new employee training, and performance audits is challenging for any lab manager. While contract labs also face these challenges, many have more robust staffing and even have several staff scientists in rotating shifts to cover operations seven days a week. Outsourcing in times you're short-staffed may be something you want to consider.

Justifying capital costs:

All equipment ages and depreciates over time. When the time comes to replace your lab equipment, you will be asked to justify the costs to your company. Typically, this includes calculating the return on investment and depreciation considerations. You may see justification for capital spend for laboratory equipment, or you may come to the decision to simply outsource the testing to a contract lab.

Whether you keep your testing in-house or decide to outsource, you want to ensure your lab is using methods that you trust. See how 3M's Food Safety methods align with your lab's protocols. Share 3M's validated methods for [quality indicators](#) and for 3M's validated [pathogen methods](#).
