

Choosing a food safety contract lab?



Food safety testing is complex. Regulations continue to change, costs for testing in-house need to be justified, and managing and training new staff in your lab can be time-consuming.

Is it time to outsource some of your safety and quality testing? If you're ready to take that step, ask yourself these five questions before you select a contract lab.

1. Do they operate within the global ISO accreditation standards?

As a starting point when choosing a contract lab, look for one with the ISO/IEC 17025 accreditation, the standard for laboratories that provide testing services. ISO accreditation is one of the most assured ways labs demonstrate they are operating in accordance to globally recognized standards.

2. Is the lab located close enough to your plant?

Time matters in food processing. Proximity to your production site is key if you're looking to keep logistics as simple as possible and don't want to pay costly courier fees for sample pickups. Most food processors that outsource prefer to choose a contract lab partner within 100 miles of their plant.

3. Do their methods on scope align to your internal testing strategy?

When outsourcing certain tests, ask your contract lab about the methods they intend to use for your samples. Do they value the quality of the method or does it seem the cost of consumables is their primary driver? As the customer, your preferences should matter to your contract lab representative. After all, no one knows your company's matrices better than you do. If you know a method works better on your matrices than others, ask for it even if it is not currently on their scope.

4. What is the total cost to outsource?

Most food processors report that they do not achieve cost savings when they

outsource their food safety testing. However, there are other benefits that sometimes outweigh the cost. When working with the representatives from the contract labs you are considering, ask about total cost, including sample collection supplies, transportation of samples and so on. That should help you determine if there are cost savings, or if other benefits of outsourcing outweigh cost considerations.

5. Are the extras important to you?

Many contract labs will offer additional services to their customers beyond the microbiology and chemical testing you need. For example, they may offer educational events and resources to advance your internal team's technical abilities and industry knowledge, opportunities to network with industry colleagues, and audit support.

Want even more guidance on choosing a contract lab partner?

Download 3M's [worksheet on choosing a contract lab](#).