



Wisconsin Food Code Fact Sheet



Retail License Requirements for Personal Chefs, Contract Cooks and Caterers

“Personal chef,” “contract cook” and “caterer” are food code terms used to describe a certain type of activity or service provided. Understanding the differences in each term will help you understand the activities or services that may require a retail license or may be exempt from obtaining a retail license.

Personal chefs and **contract cooks** are defined in [ATCP 75.04](#). [ATCP 75.063](#) further qualifies what activities may be conducted under each category without needing a retail license. These chefs and cooks are employed for their cooking skills and may not sell food or meals. Food may not be prepared off site of the cooking venue, and no meals may be transported from one location to another.

Catering is the activity of providing food for a specific event at a location other than the licensed retail food establishment on a contractual, prearranged basis to a predefined subset of the general public (e.g., wedding guests) or to participants in an organized group or activity. Catering does not include the sale of individual meals directly to the consumer.

Personal Chef

A personal chef who does all of the following is exempt from a retail license:

- Uses only the home kitchen of the contractor employing the personal chef.
- Cooks only for the family and non-paying guests.
- Pays only for the cooking service, culinary skills, technique, or expertise.
- Shops for food from a list provided by the person employing the service, or using the food provided at the home kitchen.
- Prepares and stores food at a single location and avoids transporting meals to another site.



Example: A personal chef is hired by a family to come into its home and prepare meals for the week from food purchased by the family. The family then reheats the meals each day for dinner.

Contract Cook

A contract cook who does all of the following is exempt from a retail license:

- Prepares food only onsite at the contracted location.
- Uses only food provided by the contractor employing the cook's services.
- Receives payment only for the cooking service, culinary skills, technique or expertise.
- Prepares and stores food at a single location.
- Avoids transporting any food or portion of a meal from one location to another. *Exception: they may pick up a carcass (such as a whole hog) purchased in advance by the contractor, and transport it to the event.*
- Brings only specialized tools and equipment to the event.



Example: A contract cook is hired to roast a pig at an anniversary party.

Caterer

A caterer is defined by the following:

- Prepares the food at a commercial kitchen where the caterer holds a retail food license. On site preparation or cooking—such as grilling chicken, burgers, or brats—must be approved by the regulatory authority.
- Contracts for a defined amount of food or population; does not sell onsite per meal.
- Transports meals to the service location and sets up service. Caterers may plate the meals.
- Does not require a license at the service location.



Example: A caterer is hired to provide a meal for a wedding reception estimated to have 200 guests.