LaunchTime Solutions

FREE TOOL FOR FOOD FOUNDERS

Co-manufacturer vetting checklist

54 questions to ask before you sign with a co-manufacturer. Use one copy per plant you are seriously considering.

Co-manufacturer	
Plant location	
Evaluated by	
Date	
Status	*Identified / In progress / Qualified / Not qualified / On hold*

HOW TO USE IT

Sign the NDA first. Share no formula, process parameter or supplier detail until a mutual NDA is countersigned.

Get key answers in writing. Line time, MOQ, pricing and IP ownership belong in email or the contract, not only in a call.

Visit before you commit. A plant walk tells you more about sanitation, allergen control and culture than any questionnaire.

Response column. Mark each answer Yes, No, Partial, N/A or Pending, and note follow-ups beside it.

Identification and general

#	Question	Response	Notes and follow-up
1	What is the co-man's legal name, DBA and primary plant address?		
2	Which channels do they primarily serve: CPG, foodservice or both?		
3	How long have they been in operation, and how many years as a co-manufacturer?		
4	Can they share references from current or past brand clients?		*Call 2 to 3 references*
5	Are they certified to a GFSI-benchmarked scheme (SQF, BRCGS, FSSC 22000)? Current certificate dates?		*Request a copy of the certificate and latest audit score*
6	Is the facility registered with FDA, and do they have a PCQI and a written Food Safety Plan?		*Ask for the registration number; the FDA database is not public*
7	Do they carry product liability insurance? What are the coverage limits?		*Ask to be named as additional insured*

Contacts

#	Question	Response	Notes and follow-up
8	Who is the production manager? Name, email, direct phone.		
9	Who is the R&D; or food science lead? Name, email, direct phone.		
10	Who is the primary commercial or sales contact? Name, email, phone.		
11	What is their typical response time?		*Track it during vetting*

Legal and IP

#	Question	Response	Notes and follow-up
12	Is a mutual NDA signed before any formulas or process parameters are shared?		*Do not share IP without an NDA*
13	When was the NDA countersigned, and where is the signed copy stored?		
14	Does their contract confirm that your formulas, recipes and processes remain your IP?		*Read this clause closely*
15	Are there exclusivity terms? Will they produce for direct competitors?		
16	What are the contract terms: minimum commitment, term length, exit clauses?		

Production model

#	Question	Response	Notes and follow-up
17	Do they work turnkey, tolling or hybrid?		*Turnkey: they source ingredients. Tolling: you supply them.*
18	What is the MOQ, in units and/or pounds?		
19	What is their maximum monthly capacity for your product category?		
20	Is line time available when you need it? Have they confirmed it?		*Get it in writing*
21	What is the typical lead time from PO to shipment?		
22	How is production scheduled, and how far ahead must you book?		
23	What is their standard batch size, and can it be adjusted?		

Equipment and capabilities

#	Question	Response	Notes and follow-up
24	What key processing equipment do they have (kettles, mixers, extruders, fillers)?		
25	Which kill step or pasteurization methods do they run on site?		*HPP, retort, HTST, tunnel, etc.*
26	Do they have fermentation capability (tanks, temperature control, inoculation)?		*If relevant to your product*
27	What temperature control do they have for processing and cold storage?		
28	Do they have R&D; or pilot-scale capability for refining the formula?		
29	What is their process for scaling up from pilot to production?		

Allergen management

#	Question	Response	Notes and follow-up
30	Which of the major food allergens are present in the facility?		*Milk, eggs, fish, shellfish, tree nuts, peanuts, wheat, soybeans, sesame*
31	Do they have validated sanitation procedures (SSOPs) for allergen changeover?		
32	Is a dedicated or allergen-free line available if you need one?		
33	Do they hold allergen-free certifications (for example, gluten-free)?		
34	How do they manage allergen labeling and lot traceability?		

Packaging capabilities

#	Question	Response	Notes and follow-up
35	Which packaging materials can they run (glass, PET, pouch, carton, can, aseptic)?		
36	Which pack sizes and fill weights can they run?		*List every format you need*
37	Can they apply labels in house?		
38	Can they build multipacks or club-store configurations?		
39	What case-pack configurations can they handle?		
40	Do they offer finished-goods warehousing or cold storage? For how long?		

Quality and compliance

#	Question	Response	Notes and follow-up
41	Which QC tests are done in house, and which go to a third-party lab?		
42	How do they handle out-of-spec product?		
43	Can they support your label claims (organic, non-GMO, kosher, etc.)?		*Ask which certifications the plant holds*
44	Do they have a written recall plan, and when did they last run a mock recall?		
45	What shelf life have they achieved on similar products?		*Your own shelf-life study still applies*

Financial and commercial

#	Question	Response	Notes and follow-up
46	How do they price: per unit, per pound or per run?		
47	What setup, trial-run or other one-time fees apply?		
48	What are the payment terms?		*Net 30, Net 45, etc.*
49	Are raw materials passed through at cost or marked up?		
50	What is the change-order process and cost for formula adjustments?		

Overall assessment

#	Question	Response	Notes and follow-up
51	Does this co-man fit your quality standards and brand values?		
52	What red flags came up during vetting?		
53	Recommendation: proceed, do not proceed, or on hold?		
54	Next steps, owner and due date:		

Need a second set of eyes on a co-manufacturer? The first conversation is free: launchtime.solutions.

This checklist is a general guide, not legal or regulatory advice. Have contracts reviewed by your attorney.