



How to Find a Co-Packer

Guidance for Entrepreneurs

Please re-download every 6 months to a year as the links are updated regularly.

Why use a Co-Manufacturer?

Co-manufacturing, or using a third-party to manufacture or package your product, is an effective way to bring your concept to market. Using a co-manufacturer (also called a co-packer or “co-man”) can save time and money if you need higher-volume production runs. You don’t need to hire staff, purchase equipment, deal with regulatory inspections or buy permits. All of those costs will, however, be passed on to you in the finished product’s “turnkey” price. Given that the co-manufacturer is probably making millions of units a day of similar products, buying the finished good from the co-man may make financial sense if you start off with smaller production runs.

In addition to the turnkey price, you may have to pay additional separate costs associated with:

- **Test runs:** the cost of manufacturing the first test batch
- **Line time:** the cost of running the equipment “line,” including all the staff, clean-up, and energy costs
- **Quality/safety testing:** third party testing, to ensure your product meets all required specifications
- **Internal R&D resources:** if your product needs to be further commercialized, a co-manufacturer may charge you for research and development time

Finding a co-packer online can sometimes be frustrating. Co-manufacturers’ own websites are often designed for people already in the know (Business to Business). Descriptions of their processes may use strange terms like “flexible pouch retort,” “extrusion facility,” or “form and fill sealers.” Nevertheless, with careful research, evaluation and patience you will usually find what you need.



#1. Websites and eBooks



Search Co-Manufacturing Search Engine Websites and eBooks

Start your search by going to websites that have set up search engines that list co packers across the U.S. Unfortunately many of these sites are free and not updated on a regular basis, so the information provided may be out of date. The first one listed, PartnerSlate, has a fee, but it is affordable and they keep their list up to date!



Key Links



PartnerSlate

Visit Link

[PartnerSlate](#)



Visit Link

[Institute of Food
Technologists Services
Directory](#)



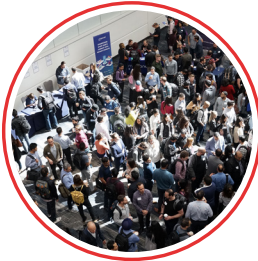
Visit Link

[Specialty Food
Association Resources](#)

Plus:

- [The Contract Packaging Association](#)
- [Food Processing Magazine Top 100® Food and Beverage Companies for 2020](#)
- [Bevnet Beverage Companies and Distributor Directory](#)
- [Beverage Industry Annual Manual](#)
- [UC Davis Co-Packers](#)
- [Cornell Food Science Department List of Small Co-Packers and Commercial Kitchens](#)
- [Penn State Extension List of Co-Packers/Manufacturers in Pennsylvania and Beyond](#)
- [Michael Adams The Ultimate Co-Packing Guide \(\\$10\)](#)

#2. Trade Shows



Attend Business to Business Trade Shows

Another way to find co-packers is to attend trade shows that allow private label manufacturers to exhibit their services. You can [download my free trade show guide here](#) and review all the industry trade shows to see which one will feature products similar to yours. From there you can network, have conversations with equipment manufacturers and make inquiries. Most of the people you meet will know someone who knows someone—you just need to be bold and ask lots of questions!



Key Links



[Institute of Food Technologists Annual Trade Show](#)



[Supply Side West Trade Show](#)



[Specialty Food Association Trade Show](#)

#3. Universities



Visit Your Local University with a “Food Science” Department

Food companies all hire food scientists and food scientists all got their degrees from a Food Science Department. There are quite a few in the U.S. and it is easy to get in touch with the professors there and ask them if they know of any manufacturers. The Institute of Food Technologists (IFT) has published a list of all approved Undergraduate Food Science Departments in the U.S. Cornell University has published a list of professors who provide technical assistance (mostly for food safety) across the U.S. as well. These professors often have contacts with local manufacturers. You can also view my official list of University pilot plant facilities that offer assistance to start up companies and have small production facilities as well.

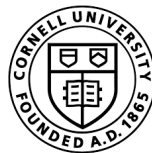


Key Links



[Visit Link](#)

[IFT List of Official Food Science Departments in the U.S.](#)



[Visit Link](#)

[Cornell University List of Professors Who Provide Assistance](#)



[Visit Link](#)

[My List of University Pilot Plant Facilities](#)

#4. Industry Events



Attend Local (and often free!) Industry Events In Your Area and Connect with Food Science Mentors and Professionals

Both the Research Chef Association (RCA) and the Institute of Food Technologists (IFT) have regional sections that are responsible for planning and executing local networking events. I should know, I am the regional contact for the Northern California RCA group and I have planned and organized many industry functions. The only way to know what is going on is to visit your region or email your local regional contact. I specifically mention the RCA here because I know that quite a few IFT members will cross over and attend events from both of these organizations. The IFT also has mentor programs to connect professionals with students and entrepreneurs.



Key Links



[Visit Link](#)

[Institute of Food Technologists Regional Events](#)



[Visit Link](#)

[Research Chefs Association Regional Events](#)



[Visit Link](#)

[E-Mentors via Institute of Food Technologists](#)

#5. Food Tech Memberships



Become a Paying Member of Food Tech Organizations for More Resources

While many of the organizations offer free resources, sometimes there are more opportunities if you become a paying member of official groups like IFT and RCA. The RCA has a online private group for paying members that brings together ingredient suppliers and manufacturers, IFT offers discounts for online classes and industry events. Three of the main organizations are listed here, but [my free trade show guide](#) can provide you with links to other industry trade organizations that have their own membership programs.



Key Links



[Join Institute of Food Technologists](#)



[Join Research Chefs Association](#)



[Join Specialty Food Association](#)

I hope you found this guide helpful as you begin your search for a manufacturer. The process is not easy, you have to first find those co-packers and then assess if they are the best fit for you and your product. There are lots of factors to consider like their pricing, location, minimum order quantities, storage capabilities and more. Do your homework and vet them well before jumping in.



Rachel Zemser

Food Scientist and Founder of A La Carte Connections, LLC

A [Certified Food Scientist](#) (IFT) and [Certified Culinary Scientist](#) (RCA). Experience and advanced degrees in both food science and culinary arts. Rachel has a BS in Food Science from the University of Massachusetts, an MS degree in Food Microbiology from the University of Illinois and a culinary arts degree from the New York Restaurant School/ Art Institute. Rachel has been working in the food industry for 25 years in both technical and creative roles. [Visit Rachel's linked in profile.](#)

- Certified Culinary Scientist | Research Chefs Association
- Adjunct Professor of Food Science | San Francisco State University
- Certified Food Scientist | Institute of Food Technologists
- Contributing Author | "Culinology" The Intersection of Culinary Arts and Food Science



Good luck on your search!

For more insights on how to work with a co-packer, book an hour of consulting with Rachel Zemser and receive a copy of her best-selling ebook, [The Food Business Toolkit for Entrepreneurs](#).

[View the Offer](#)