

Federal Regulations Affecting Food Tech Companies that Provide Meal-Kit Services

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“Food tech” companies, such as HelloFresh and Blue Apron, have gained popularity in recent years by providing “meal-kit” service subscriptions to consumers. To utilize meal-kit service subscriptions, a consumer chooses multiple meals weekly from a pre-set menu on a food tech company’s website/app. Then every week, a package with the necessary ingredients and instructions to prepare each chosen meal is delivered to the consumer. Meal-kits allow subscribers to skip going to the grocery store and planning meals—which is attractive to those with busy lifestyles.

While meal-kit subscriptions have proven to be a popular trend, the high demand for meal-kit services and pressure on meal-kit providers to fulfill weekly deliveries can contribute to a variety of regulatory issues for food tech companies.

First, like other companies in the food-service industry, food tech companies must follow USDA food storage guidelines. Meal-kit service providers should take care to ensure that fresh produce, meats, and other perishable foods are properly stored throughout all stages of order fulfillment. Particularly, special attention should be given to food storage where traditional refrigeration is not generally available, such as during meal-kits’ transportation to consumers.

Second, employees of food tech companies perform a variety of services, including working at meal-kit fulfillment centers and operating mediums of food delivery. Like other companies in the food industry, food tech companies must closely monitor food-handling methods to protect employees’ health. Unsafe food-handling is just one factor that can lead to employment conditions failing to meet health and safety standards promulgated by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).

The preceding regulatory issues together present an interesting balancing exercise for meal-kit providers. While food storage guidelines operate to protect consumers from food-related illnesses, they can also negatively affect employee working conditions. Specifically, the USDA requires many foods to be kept at forty degrees Fahrenheit, and as a result, meal-kit providers’ fulfillment centers and warehouses must be set at cold temperatures. Employees performing manual labor work in such temperatures, often for up to twelve hours per day, are at risk of various health conditions. Accordingly, complying with USDA food storage guidelines can have unwanted consequences on meal-kit providers’ ability to meet OSHA working condition standards. Food tech companies should evaluate both USDA guidelines and OSHA standards in conjunction.

Meal-kit service subscriptions allow consumers to plan weekly meals with ease and convenience. If the meal-kit industry continues to grow, one might expect additional regulations tailored to meal-kit service and providers thereof.

For additional information on the meal-kit industry and discussion of regulatory issues food tech companies face, see this article linked [here!](#)