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STRENGTHENING FARMERS & FOOD SYSTEMS



Walk-in Cooler Tips

Stacking products & prepared foods in a walk-in cooler—or, worse, wedging them into tight spots in an overtaxed cooler reduces quality & creates a chaotic space. Organizing space must be a priority for it to be used to its fullest potential in maintaining product rotation. Well organized coolers help protect your food-dollar investments & reduces shrink while conforming to health-codes. It also creates efficiency for staff to who oversee ordering, receiving and saves labor for stocking or food preparation. Due diligence with standard operating procedures in place builds teamwork, reduces product loss and increases labor efficiency. Walk-ins are an ever-changing puzzle, some staff love the job, others loathe it. Find the right fit with your team.

Here are tips to easily make into a check list for staff training:

1. No food on the floor, ever. For best practices in food safety, use *dunnage racks* to lift product off the floor & stack cases.
2. If a walkin has co-mingled food (*ex meat & produce*) always place meat on the lowest shelf. This prevents any possible meat juice from dripping contaminating other products.
3. Use metal racks instead of wood; keep fragile produce away from fans; they create micro-environments that can reduce quality of produce for those in the direct path of the forced air.
4. Air needs to circulate; leave space above & below shelving; Ideally the walkin is not so stuffed that air cannot circulate & can even cause temperature imbalances.
5. Make a temperature map of the walk-in cooler by placing several thermometers throughout the unit and take readings at 10- to 15-minute intervals during periods of temperature recovery. The coldest section of the refrigerator should be used for potentially hazardous foods. Note, it is most often *warmer near the door and the ceiling and cooler at the rear of the box and near the floor*.
6. Label everything & always have them facing out for all staff to easily identify products. Labels from distributors are often hard to read in a walk-in cooler. Product expiration dates should also face outward.
7. Rotate product: the rule is first in, first out, but *sometimes a vendor sends short-dated products* so quality & date checks supersede this rule.
8. Use of clear food storage containers are useful to help identify product.
9. Sweep & organize the walk-in daily, deep clean refrigeration coils at least four times a year for optimal operation & reducing mold or other contaminants.

