

Resource guide for veterans in the food industry

For veterans, transitioning servicemembers and their spouses interested in a career in food products or consumer packaged goods, here is a guide to get you started.

By Ashley Gorbulja

What are Consumer Packaged Goods (CPG)? These are products that customers frequently use and replace. These goods are typically sold in packaging and include items such as:

- Food and beverages
- Cleaning products
- Toiletries and personal care items
- Over-the-counter medications

1. Getting started: core resources

These national programs are ideal for veterans beginning their CPG journey:

- **Veterans Business Outreach Centers (VBOCs):** Business planning, access to capital, and early-stage mentorship.
 - [Find your local VBOC](#)
- **Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF):** Offers V-WISE, EBV, Bunker Labs, and Onward to Opportunity. A powerhouse for business-minded veterans.
 - ivmf.syracuse.edu
- **The Kitchen Door:** National database of shared-use commercial kitchens and food incubators.
 - thekitchendoor.com
- **Veteran Institute for Procurement (VIP):** For those seeking government contracts or food service opportunities (MREs, DFAC, commissaries).
 - <https://nationalvip.org/>

2. Food product development must-knows

Moving from recipe to retail requires regulatory knowledge and technical detail:

- **FDA food labeling compliance:**
 - [FDA Labeling Guide](#)
- **Shelf stability:** Consider pH testing, water activity levels, and whether your product qualifies for cottage food laws or needs a licensed co-packer.
- **Nutrition labels:** Tools like ReciPal or working with a registered dietitian are industry standard.
- **Barcodes and UPCs:** Required for most retailers, and even Direct-to-Consumer fulfillment if you scale.
 - [GS1 US](#)
- **Cottage vs. commercial food laws:** State-by-state rules differ on whether you can sell from home or need a licensed facility.
 - [Cottage Food Laws By State - Rules, Tips, Links, Everything Important](#)

3. Kitchen incubators and co-packers

Whether you're looking for a shared kitchen or ready to outsource production:

- [6888 Kitchen Incubator \(Dayton, OH\):](#)
- [CommonWealth Kitchen \(Boston, MA\)](#)
- [La Cocina \(San Francisco, CA\)](#)
- [Co-Packer Directory – For finding food manufacturers and packers.](#)

4. Mentorship and niche food programs

The food space is competitive. Do your research to help you succeed. Here are some good resources to start with:

- [Food Finance Institute – Financial modeling and pitch help.](#)
- [Naturally Network – Great for emerging CPG founders.](#)
- [SCORE Mentors – Local mentorship with food experience.](#)

Ask for mentors specific to:

- Direct-to-Consumer vs. wholesale scaling

- Co-packer vetting
- USDA vs. FDA distinctions
- Brokers and distribution reps

Advanced Resource Summary (Intermediate/Advanced Food Founders)

For those with existing traction, wholesale accounts, or funding:

Area	Key Considerations
Supply Chain Resilience	Secure backup vendors; plan for ingredient shortages or commodity shifts.
Batch Testing & Safety	Partner with labs for pH (potential hydrogen) levels, water activity, and pathogen control
Packaging Strategy	Balance shelf life, sustainability, and shipping efficiency.
Product Certifications	Explore certifications like USDA Organic (United States Department of Agriculture), Gluten-Free, Non-GMO (Genetically Modified Organism), and Veteran-Owned.
Retail Distribution	Create a wholesale line sheet and set up profiles on RangeMe or FAIRE (online platforms for connecting with retail buyers)
E-commerce Stack	Use Shopify (e-commerce platform), Klaviyo (email/SMS marketing), ReCharge (subscription management), and ShipBob or PirateShip (fulfillment/logistics tools)
Sales Tax & Nexus	Work with a tax accountant to understand state-by-state <i>nexus</i> (sales tax obligations across states where your business has a presence)
Metrics & Analytics	Track Customer Acquisition Cost (CAC), Average Order Value (AOV), Lifetime Value (LTV), customer churn, product margin per Stock Keeping Unit (SKU), and reorder rates