

Whole Foods Market Standards for North American Lobster
Version 5.0
March 2019

Introduction

Whole Foods Market is pleased to present our updated Quality Standards for American lobster (*Homarus americanus*). These standards specify our minimum requirements and expectations for all producers supplying or seeking to supply American lobster to Whole Foods Market. These standards apply to all production and holding units, including:

- Fishing vessels
- Wharfs
- Processing facilities
- Transport
- Whole Foods Market stores (sections 8-9 only)

It is the producer's responsibility to learn and understand the standards and to provide training to all employees to ensure compliance with all components of the program. A producer should proactively contact Whole Foods Market with any questions about the standards and work continuously to implement the standards on their vessels and in their facilities, including any necessary corrective actions discovered during third-party audits.

While these standards are formal and require mandatory compliance from producers, this is a living document. As new information becomes available, we will update our standards to reflect opportunities for improvement.

1.0 General Requirements

1.1 Compliance with Government Regulations

Producer must comply with all local, state, and national laws, codes and regulations governing operations, including, but not limited to those categories listed below.

1. Health and safety
2. Labor and employment
3. Production siting and zoning
4. Fishery license and permit requirements
5. Fishing regulations (for example, prohibition on landing female lobsters)

Producer guidance:

- Provide Certification Body with copies of any available third-party audits for health and safety.

1.2 Violations

Producer must inform Whole Foods Market, in the form of a written letter, of any major violations to government laws and regulations and specify corrective actions that will be taken. A copy of the letter must be sent to Whole Foods Market for review within 30 days of when the violation occurred and shown to the Certification Body (CB) during the audit.

1.3 Internal and Third-party Audits

All documentation, records, production units, and fishing vessels are subject to an annual audit by an independent Certification Body (CB), selected by Whole Foods Market to verify that these standards are being met. All costs incurred by obtaining and maintaining certification must be paid by suppliers.

To prepare for the external third-party audit, producers must perform and document an internal audit at all production units (vessels, vehicles, and facilities) using the approved Whole Foods Market audit checklist. Internal audits must be conducted prior to the initial external third-party audit, twice during the first year of certification and at least annually thereafter.

Producer guidance:

- The role of the CB is to verify compliance and issue certifications to qualified producers, rather than to serve as a trainer for the standards. Producers should direct standards-related questions to Whole Foods Market.
- The purpose of the internal audit is to ensure that these standards are being properly implemented and for the supplier to demonstrate oversight at all production units.
- Internal audits should be conducted after employee training is completed. The responsible company representative conducting the internal audit must go out on each vessel and observe fishing practices, live well storage, lobster handling, unloading procedures, as well as processing and transport procedures as part of their evaluation.

1.4 Employee Training

Initial and ongoing training on the current standards must be provided by the producer to all employees, contractors and sub-contractors who handle live lobster, or make decisions on product labeling, quality assurance, or quality control. Training must occur on an annual basis. It is the responsibility of the producer to ensure that the requirements of these standards are understood by these individuals. Written confirmation of attendance at trainings, or other demonstration that employees have achieved expectations of training, must be available to the CB.

Producer guidance:

- Training should provide information on the specific requirements of the Whole Foods Market standards for all responsible staff.
- Training can be experience-based or through a formal program.

1.5 Production Units

All production units, including vessels, vehicles, wharves, and processing facilities used to supply American lobster to Whole Foods Market must be provided in a list to the Certification Body (CB) prior to the initial audit. Any changes to production units after the initial audit must be documented and reported to the CB within 60 days of the change occurring.

1.6 Segregation of Products

If the producer handles lobsters that do not meet these standards for other customers, then written procedures and management must be in place to guarantee separation of products that meet WFM standards from those that do not. Third-party audits will verify that product segregation is in place.

1.7 Traceability

Suppliers must utilize the Trace Register electronic traceability software to allow Whole Foods Market to verify sourcing of lobster and to track products throughout the supply chain.

2.0 Handling

2.1 Lobsters must be handled with great care at all times, as one would handle an item that is breakable or an animal that can easily be injured.

2.2 Lobsters must be kept wet and cool (3-5°C or 37-41°F) or at water temperatures of the harvest or wharf area at all times.

2.3 Lobsters should be removed from traps in the gentlest way possible. Claws should be supported during handling.

2.4 When placing lobster into an individual compartment, the tail must be tucked with body and claws held in an elongated position.

3.0 Fishing Vessels

3.1 Suppliers must have a signed affidavit from each vessel captain supplying lobster to Whole Foods Market. The affidavit attests that the captain understands the Whole Foods Market requirements and is implementing these requirements aboard his/her vessel.

3.2 All lobsters must be caught using lobster traps.

3.3 Lobsters must be protected from elements that can cause stress, such as extremely cold or extremely hot air or water temperatures, as well as freezing wind.

3.4 Once removed from lobster traps, lobsters must be placed into a holding system with fresh circulating ocean water within 30 minutes.

3.5 Lobsters must be caught and landed within the same single calendar day.

For lobsters that will be processed (not sold live):

3.6 Lobsters must be firm and medium shell. Lobsters not meeting the hard shell criteria as defined in Standard 3.6 qualify for processing. Lobster with "paper soft" shells will not be processed.

For lobsters destined to be sold live:

3.7 Lobsters must be hard-shell, also known as old-shell.

Producer Guidance:

- Hard-shell lobsters are required for live sale to maintain safer transport. A hardshell lobster is identified by one or more of the following characteristics: (i) presence of barnacles; (ii) presence of dark shell pigments; and (iii) scratch marks on the shell. In addition, a common technique for determining if lobsters are hard shell is to gently squeeze the middle of the pincher claw and observe the movement of the clear joint membrane between the knuckle and the pincher claw. Little to no movement or flexing of the membrane indicates hardshell.

3.8 Once removed from lobster traps, lobsters must be placed into individual compartments. Lobsters that will be processed (not sold live) are not required to be placed into individual compartments.

3.9 Totes with individual compartments must be submersed in running seawater.

4.0 At the Wharf - Unloading From the Boats

4.1 Lobster totes must be held level and moved by methods that minimize jostling, banging and injury to lobster.

4.2 After offloading from the vessels, within one hour all lobsters must be placed within an open (flow-through), holding system filled with ocean water to maintain lobster viability.

For lobsters that will be processed (not sold live):

4.3 Lobsters can be held in an open (flow-through) holding system at the wharf for a maximum of 24 hours before transport to the processing facility. Producer must maintain time logs specifying the amount of time lobsters are held in reservoirs prior to transport.

For Lobsters destined to be sold live:

4.4 "Seasoning" crates must be immersed in an open (flow-through) holding system for a minimum of 24 and a maximum of 48 hours prior to being shipped from the facility. Producer must maintain logs detailing the amount of time lobsters are kept in holding systems prior to transport.

Producer Guidance:

- “Seasoning” is a process used to purge fecal material out of the lobster’s gut.

5.0 Transport--from Wharf to Processing Facility or directly to Whole Foods Market Store (for Live Lobsters)

5.1 Lobster totes must be transported using refrigerated trucks with air temperature maintained between 37-44°F. Temperature logs must be kept and producer must have a system for checking that correct temperatures are maintained.

Alternatively:

Lobsters must be transported in an insulated box with gel packs or other cooling methods to maintain temperature at 37-44°F. If fresh-water ice is used, it must be kept separate from contact with lobster.

5.2 The total time that lobsters are out of water and transported must not exceed 12 hours for new shell lobsters and 24 hours for hard shell lobsters. Transport time begins when the first crate of lobsters is loaded onto the truck and trucked directly to the processing facility or to Whole Foods Market store and ends when the last lobster is passed through the stunner, or when lobsters are placed into an open (flow-through) holding system at the processing facility. Alternatively, transport time may begin once lobsters are removed from floating stations and transported by secondary vessels (*i.e.*, “smack” vessels) to a wharf, truck, or processing plant. Transport time on “smack vessels” counts towards the transport time. Time logs must be kept to show start and end times for transport.

6.0 Processing Facility

6.1 Upon arrival at the processing facility, lobsters are evaluated. Dead lobsters are removed.

6.2 All lobsters must either be 1) processed immediately; or 2) placed into an open (flow-through) holding system filled with ocean water; or 3) placed in a cooler that maintains the same temperature as the transport trucks, 37-44°F. If lobsters are not placed into an open (flow-through) holding system, new shell lobsters must be processed within the 12-hour transportation window and hard shell lobsters must be processed within the 24-hour transportation window. Lobsters placed into an open (flow-through) holding system must be processed within 24 hours of arrival at the facility. Producers must maintain time logs showing the amount of time lobsters are held at the processing facility.

7.0 Slaughter Methods for Lobsters sold to Whole Foods Market

7.1 Lobsters must be completely stunned using a properly designed crustacean stunning machine or killed by high-pressure processing (HPP) prior to processing.

Producer guidance:

- If stunning is used and there is any evidence of high levels of activity, lobsters must be re-stunned.

7.2 All stunning and processing equipment must be maintained according to the manufacturer's specifications.

The Following Sections (8-9) Apply Only to WFLN Approved Store Locations Selling Live Lobsters:

8.0 Receiving and holding live lobsters at the store:

8.1 Lobsters must be received at the store in the same individual compartments in which they were transported.

8.2. The store must have a system for identifying the lot received.

8.3 The store must have a system for tracking rotation of lobsters in the tank.

8.4 The entire plastic habitat will be placed into a coated wire mesh cage and laid flat in lobster holding tank.

8.5 Due to high toxicity to lobsters, no airborne pesticides may be used in store.

8.6 Lobster holding tanks must be kept clean of algae growth, per manufacturer's recommendations. Glass cleaner is prohibited from use on tank.

8.7 Lobsters must be kept submerged in salt water, in lobster compartments, in lobster holding tanks at the store. Salinity must be maintained within the range of 28-35 parts per thousand, according to the manufacturer's specifications.

8.8 Water temperature in tanks in the store must be maintained at 37-41°F (3-5°C) at all times.

8.9 Lobsters can be held in stores for a maximum of 7 days from point of receiving, after which they must be processed using the Crustastun™.

9.0 Sale to Customer and Home Transport

9.1 Team Members must offer customers the option of having their lobster killed using the in-store Crustastun™.

9.2 Live lobsters must be placed into a waxed paper bag for transport home by customers.

9.3 Lobsters must be given to customers in a container that allows them to be kept cool, such as a cooler or waxed paper bag placed over a gel pack or ice. If ice is used, it must be kept separate from contact with lobster.

Producer guidance:

- Contact with fresh water or fresh water ice will kill lobster.