



UNDERSTANDING COLD CHAIN:

# Expert Guidance on Perishable Food and Beverage Shipping

## What to look for in a reliable food shipping company

Food and beverage supply chains demand precision at every touchpoint. Whether you are shipping fresh, refrigerated, frozen, prepared or shelf-stable products, the right logistics provider helps protect product integrity, maintain required temperatures, and keep orders moving across complex distribution networks.

Strong food and beverage logistics partners provide shippers with scalable transportation planning, cold chain management, warehousing, fulfillment, inventory control and shipment visibility in a way that fits the shipper's operation. They should be able to create logistics solutions tailored to product requirements, shelf-life constraints, order channels, packaging needs, documentation, and service expectations before recommending a path forward.

Cold chain disruptions, delayed releases, inaccurate inventory, missed appointment windows, and inconsistent communication can create real risk for food brands, distributors, retailers, and food service operations. Even one shipment moving outside specification can affect product quality, customer confidence, and cost.

The right food provider should reduce these risks through practical process design with the ideal mix of transportation planning, temperature-controlled handling, packaging support, inventory visibility, lot tracking, exception management and proactive communication. It should also be able to help you build a practical operating model, then adapt as demand, seasonality and market conditions shift without forcing the shipper into a one-size-fits-all model.

# Essential components of perishable food and beverage logistics

A successful food or beverage shipment depends on more than moving freight from point A to point B. The full program should account for product characteristics, temperature needs, order timing, compliance requirements, documentation, and visibility from origin through delivery.

Key considerations include:

## The right cold chain partner

Effective food logistics starts with the provider you choose. Look for a partner with proactive communication, a consultative approach, a global network of facilities and transportation options, experienced food logistics professionals, and clear shipment and inventory visibility. Your provider should understand applicable food safety, customs and transportation requirements and be able to design solutions around your products and service needs.

## Product receipt and release

From first receipt through final delivery, product condition and timing matter. Whether products are moving through a temperature-controlled facility, staged for release, or transported to an end client, the process should support proper handling, accurate inventory records, lot control, FIFO or FEFO management, and preservation of required conditions.

## Transportation and distribution planning

The right shipping plan matches product requirements with the appropriate service level, mode and equipment. Depending on the shipment, that may include parcel, LTL, FTL, dedicated delivery, air freight, sea freight, appointment scheduling, proof of delivery, specialized handling or final-mile options for temperature-sensitive and time-critical food shipments.

## Cold chain and product integrity management

Temperature-controlled handling is critical for maintaining quality across fresh, refrigerated, frozen and other sensitive products. A reliable provider should use appropriate storage conditions, packaging support, monitoring procedures and exception management to help protect product integrity while supporting compliance with applicable food safety requirements, including the Food Safety Modernization Act.



## Food and beverage shipping requirements

When planning a food or beverage logistics program, it is important to work with an experienced provider that can connect transportation, storage, fulfillment, distribution and visibility. Consider these requirements before building your shipping plan:



### 01 | Define the product and service requirements

Shelf-stable, temperature-controlled, fresh, refrigerated, frozen and even deep-frozen products each require different handling, storage and transportation plans. Food and beverage shippers should account for temperature requirements, shelf life, product value, lot control, order profiles, packaging, labeling, special handling and budget expectations before product moves.

An experienced logistics provider should work with your team to validate requirements up front, identify operational constraints, and recommend solutions that support product quality, service performance and cost control.



### 02 | Establish the operating model

Communication, process design and defined service expectations are critical to a successful program. Before launch, your provider should help map inbound receipt, storage, release, pick-and-pack activity, kitting, fulfillment, distribution, appointment scheduling, reporting and exception management.

Clear milestones and escalation paths help keep products moving on schedule. Your logistics partner should provide proactive updates, visibility into inventory and shipments, and practical recommendations as demand, seasonality or market conditions change.



### 03 | Execute with compliance and control

Once the plan is in place, execution should be supported by trained teams, documented processes, quality checks, systems integration and KPI reporting. The objective is to keep products within specification while minimizing delays, rejected deliveries, inventory errors and unnecessary touches.

For food recalls or other product recovery needs, the provider should also support traceability, segregation, inspection, disposition routing and reporting so shippers can make timely, informed decisions.

## Ready to add global food and beverage logistics professionals to your team?

AIT helps food and beverage shippers manage temperature-sensitive transportation, warehousing, fulfillment, distribution and contract logistics programs with greater control and visibility. Contact us to learn how our food logistics professionals can help protect product integrity, strengthen service performance, and support your supply chain goals.