

From Kitchen Concept to Shelf

THE ESSENTIAL TOOLKIT FOR
SCALING A FOOD PRODUCT



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INTRODUCTION

If you're building a food product and wondering how to take it from early idea to market-ready, you're in the right place.

As a former Vice President of Research & Development at Freshly and Campbell's, I'm passionate about helping companies prepare the most delicious & wholesome products to nourish people and the planet.

Bringing a product to life is more than recipes and hustle. It's about structure, clarity, and decisions that build real momentum. Too many great food ideas stall because they lack the right guidance at the right time. That's what this toolkit is here to help fix.

Inside, you'll find practical tools and strategies that I have used to help early-stage founders turn their kitchen concepts into scalable products.



These aren't just checklists — they're based on the same proven process I have used with entrepreneurs who've gone on to land shelf space, investors, and serious traction.

Whether you're refining your flavor profile, working out your pricing, or figuring out how to scale your production without losing your mind (or your margins), this guide will walk you through what matters most — and how to move forward with purpose.

Let's get started.

- Tom Griffiths

Your Roadmap To A Scalable Product:

The 6 Essential Stages Of Food Product Development

Launching a successful food product isn't about moving fast — it's about moving smart. Rushing into production without answering the right questions at each stage can cost you time, money, and credibility. What follows is a clear, grounded overview of how to build a product with real staying power.

Whether you're making a sauce, a frozen meal, or a plant-based snack, these six stages will help you stay focused and avoid common missteps.

1. Ideation & Consumer Insight

Start with clarity — not just about what you're making, but why it matters. The strongest food products are born from a real need or untapped craving. What does your target customer want that they're not getting? And how does your product solve for that?

Don't skip this stage. A product that excites you is great. A product that solves a problem for someone else is a business.

2. Flavor Development & Sensory Testing

This is where your creativity gets real. Begin with a flavor concept that connects with your audience — and test it early. Small-scale tasting with friends or food professionals can reveal blind spots and unlock improvements.

Balance is key: strong enough to stand out, simple enough to scale. Keep notes on reactions, preferences, and what people remember after the first bite.

3. Costing & Packaging

Too many founders fall in love with an idea and ignore the numbers. Costing isn't just about raw ingredients — it's packaging, labor, storage, and shipping. If you don't know your unit cost, you can't price with confidence.

Packaging also matters more than most realize. It's not just a container — it's part of the product. Choose materials that align with your audience, budget, and shelf life goals

4. Compliance & Labeling

No one loves this step, but it's not optional. From allergen statements to nutrition panels, getting your label right means protecting your customers and your business.

You don't have to become a regulatory expert — but you do need to work with people who know the rules. A solid label builds trust long before anyone tastes your product.

5. Production & Sourcing

This is the stage where ideas either fly or fall apart. Can your formula hold up under batch cooking? Do your ingredients arrive on time, in spec, and within budget?

You'll likely need to adjust for real-world variables: yield loss, ingredient quality, equipment limitations. This is where kitchen experience meets operational sense — and where many founders find a strong advisor makes a big difference.

6. Scaling & Distribution

It's one thing to make a great product in small batches. It's another to produce at volume and still hit your quality, margin, and fulfillment goals.

Scaling requires planning. Not just more — smarter. You'll need systems, supplier agreements, and a clear sense of your break-even point. Whether you're selling direct-to-consumer or through retail, your success depends on being ready for what growth actually demands.

Concept Validation Worksheet

Build on purpose. Test before you scale.

Before you invest in packaging, sourcing, or shelf space, it's worth taking a hard look at your concept. This worksheet helps you gut-check your idea and identify where it needs refinement — not just to survive launch, but to thrive long after.

Use this tool as a working document. Be honest. The strongest founders are the ones who challenge their own assumptions early.

For each prompt, jot down your answers or talk them through with a mentor or peer. Your goal is clarity — not perfection.



Concept Validation Worksheet

1. Who is this for?

Get specific. "Busy parents" isn't enough. Think: time-starved parents with young kids, looking for high-protein, low-prep meals.

2. What does it solve?

Is it about flavor fatigue? Lack of better options in a category? A cultural gap in what's on the shelf? Define the need your product answers.

3. What makes it different?

What do you offer that others don't? Think in terms of taste, format, ingredients, sourcing, or brand story — but make it concrete, not vague.

Concept Validation Worksheet

4. Have I tested this idea with potential customers?

Even informal feedback counts at this stage. What have you heard? What's stuck with people? What questions keep coming up?

5. Do I understand my unit economics?

Have you mapped out cost per unit, pricing targets, and margin range? If not, flag this now. It's critical before you move forward.

Designing Flavor That Sells (and Scales)

Creating bold, memorable flavor is only half the job. The other half? Making sure it works — in small batches, in large ones, and in the hands of cooks who didn't dream it up.

A standout product combines creativity with discipline. It grabs attention without overwhelming. It balances freshness with stability. And above all, it makes people crave it again.

Here's how to think about flavor in a way that delivers both satisfaction and scale.

Balance First, Then Bold

When chefs create in a kitchen, we have the luxury of real-time feedback. We taste, adjust, plate, and serve. In packaged goods or restaurant prep lines, that dynamic changes. You don't get second chances — so balance must come first.

Approachability doesn't mean boring. It means intuitive. Your flavors should feel familiar enough to invite a first bite, but interesting enough to leave a mark.

If a flavor profile feels "out there," pair it with something grounding:

- Ginger + Roasted Sweet Potato
- Tamarind + Honey-Glazed Chicken
- Fermented Carrot + Sesame Vinaigrette

Unexpected notes work best when tethered to something your audience already trusts.

The Flavor Pairing Matrix

Use this simple matrix to build layered, versatile flavor systems — whether for sauces, snacks, or entrees. Look to combine at least one element from each category:

Category	Examples
Base	Tomato, Rice, Lentil, Cream, Broth
	Citrus, Vinegar, Soy Sauce, Miso
Heat	Chili Flake, Horseradish, Jalapeño
Texture	Toasted Nuts, Seeds, Crunchy Veg
Herb/Fresh	Cilantro, Basil, Mint, Dill
Umami	Mushroom, Seaweed, Anchovy, Aged Cheese
Sweet Edge	Roasted Apple, Molasses, Dried Fruit

Choose 3–4 and test. The key isn't complexity — it's harmony. Make sure no one flavor overpowers the others. You want depth, not noise.



Common Flavor Pitfalls

Here are a few traps I see often — and how to sidestep them:

- Overloading spice: A little heat builds excitement. Too much, and it limits your audience.
- Chasing novelty: Just because a flavor is trending doesn't mean it belongs in your product.
- Skipping salt: Many early-stage products go bland trying to be "clean." Use seasoning with purpose — it's a tool, not a villain.

Smart Sourcing for Quality, Consistency, and Cost Control

Sourcing isn't just procurement — it's strategy. The partners you choose, the formats you buy, and the timing of your purchases all impact flavor, margin, and shelf life. In early-stage food businesses, small sourcing mistakes can lead to big setbacks. This cheat sheet is designed to help you avoid them.

Stage-Specific Sourcing

Your ingredient needs will shift as you grow. Here's how to approach sourcing across different phases:

1. Test Kitchen

At this stage, flexibility matters more than price. Buy from local markets, restaurant supply shops, or online retailers. You want access to small quantities for quick iteration — not long-term commitments.

2. Pilot Scale

Once you've locked in your formula, shift to bulk formats. Look for regional distributors or wholesale suppliers. Consistency becomes more important here — you're looking to mirror commercial conditions.

3. Commercial Scale

Now you're dealing with pallets, not pounds. You'll need reliable, scalable vendors who understand food safety, documentation, and logistics. This is when formal agreements matter — not just availability.



Building Relationships That Work

Strong supplier relationships aren't built on pricing alone. They're about trust, responsiveness, and shared understanding. Here's what I tell founders to focus on:

- **Be clear about your volume, needs, and expectations.** Transparency builds respect early.
- **Ask the right questions.** Where is the product processed? What happens when stock runs low? What are the lead times?
- **Stay connected.** Visit if possible. Schedule regular check-ins. Ask about market shifts before they hit your bottom line.

Sustainable & Upcycled Options

Responsible sourcing isn't just about the environment — it's about resilience. Choosing smarter inputs can help you lower costs, reduce waste, and stand out with purpose.

Here are a few ideas to consider:

- Work with farms using regenerative practices — these often yield higher nutrient density and traceability.

- Explore surplus and imperfect produce for sauces, bases, and blended products.
- Look into partners that specialize in turning byproducts into premium inputs.

Bonus: These choices also give you a stronger brand story to share with consumers and buyers.

Tool Spotlight: Ingredient Comparison Grid

Create a simple sheet to track and compare:

- Vendor name & contact
- MOQ (minimum order quantity)
- Price per unit
- Lead time
- Storage requirements
- Certifications (organic, kosher, etc.)

Keep it updated. As your business grows, this document becomes a go-to when renegotiating or onboarding new partners.

CONCLUSION

Going from 10 to 10,000 Units

Scaling Production + Checklist

Moving from your own kitchen to outsourced production is one of the most exciting — and risky — steps in the journey. It's where great ideas either become real businesses or run into costly surprises.

Scaling well doesn't mean just making more. It means translating your product into a version that holds up under pressure, stays true to its flavor, and fits inside real-world operations. Here's how to approach it with control and confidence.



When to Move from Bench to Co-Manufacturing

If you're regularly running out of capacity — or spending more time managing prep than building your brand — it may be time to look at third-party manufacturing.

Signals you're ready:

- Demand is outpacing your production bandwidth
- You've validated your recipe and format
- You understand your unit costs and have room for margin
- Your product has a shelf life that allows for scaled distribution

Scaling Pitfalls to Watch

Avoiding common mistakes can save you tens of thousands of dollars — not to mention months of frustration.

- Over-flavoring: Scaling a recipe isn't just math. Some ingredients — like salt, spice, or acid — amplify with time or heat. Test scaled batches with real production methods.
- Unstable ingredients: What works in a small pot may split, fade, or separate over time. Run shelf-life trials before committing.

- Incompatible packaging: Your package isn't just a shell. It's part of the production line. Misalignment here can halt your run or trigger spoilage.
- Lack of documentation: Your co-manufacturer needs a spec sheet, not a guess. Precise weights, tolerances, prep steps — all matter.

Production Prep Checklist

Use this quick list to check your readiness before you scale:

- Final recipe documented in weight, not volume
- Ingredients tested for consistency and supply
- Shelf life validated under multiple storage conditions
- Packaging tested for durability, fit, and food contact compliance
- Allergen and compliance reviews complete
- Nutritional panel reviewed and confirmed
- Co-manufacturer or shared kitchen partner identified and evaluated
- Clear run targets, yield assumptions, and batch sizes documented
- Backup ingredient vendors identified
- Final product tested with a small pilot run

The 4 Dimensions of a Successful Scale-Up

TWG's Scaling Framework

Scaling is rarely just a supply chain issue. It's a systems issue — and strong systems don't happen by accident. Over the years, I've seen great products hit a wall because one piece of the operation couldn't keep pace with the rest.

At TWG Consulting, we look at scale through four key lenses. If you're missing any one of them, friction shows up — in flavor drift, missed shipments, rising costs, or team breakdowns. Here's how to spot and solve those gaps before they slow you down.



1

R&D Discipline

Flavor. Consistency. Shelf Life. A well-developed product isn't just tasty — it performs. That means it holds up across time, temperature shifts, and multiple production runs. Your R&D process should lock in not only what the product is, but what it isn't.

You need:

- Clear specs
- Controlled testing
- Shelf-life data you trust

This is your foundation. Without it, everything else wobbles.

2

Ingredient Sourcing

Quality. Availability. Resilience. Strong sourcing is about more than price. It's about steady access, low risk, and inputs that do the job — every time. Can you get what you need, when you need it, at scale? Can your vendor pivot when crops fail or freight gets delayed?

Look for:

- Proven suppliers with production experience
- Backup options for key ingredients
- Inputs that align with shelf life, flavor, and handling requirements

Smart sourcing smooths out volatility and helps you stay in control.

3

Kitchen & Production Efficiency

Cross-Utilization. Mise en Place. Yield Control. Whether you're producing in-house or with a co-packer, inefficiency bleeds margin. Every extra motion, wasted ounce, or missed timing window adds up.

What to focus on:

- Cross-using ingredients to reduce waste
- Standardized prep and portioning
- Documented workflows and clear SOPs
- Built-in feedback loops for continuous improvement

It's not about cutting corners — it's about precision.

4

Team Alignment

Roles. Communication. Accountability. Your team doesn't have to be big — it has to be tight. Misalignment between marketing, operations, and product leads to mixed messaging, poor launches, and internal friction.

You need:

- Clear ownership of every major function
- Shared understanding of timelines and constraints
- Regular, focused communication (not chaos in a group chat)

Scale is easier when everyone's pulling in the same direction.

Pro Tip: Respect runs the kitchen — even when the kitchen becomes a factory.

That principle applies to your process, your people, and your product.

Inside the Incubator: Expert Advice for First-Time Founders

What to Expect at a Food Incubator

A food incubator can fast-track your idea — or overwhelm you if you're not ready. These spaces exist to support early-stage food businesses, offering more than just kitchen access. The best ones combine production resources with regulatory guidance, connections, and seasoned mentorship.

If you're serious about launching a product the right way, an incubator can help you skip costly guesswork. But the more prepared you are going in, the more you'll get out of it.

What Incubators Actually Offer

Here's what most food incubators provide — and why it matters:

- Commercial kitchen access with equipment that matches production environments

- Support for labeling, licensing, and compliance so you don't have to figure it out solo
- Access to experts who understand scale, regulation, and retail standards
- Workshops and mentorship that go beyond the basics
- Connections to co-packers, distributors, and potential buyers

The best incubators aren't just spaces — they're systems built to help founders launch with confidence.

What to Prepare Before Applying

If you're considering an incubator, show up with focus. You don't need a perfect product — but you do need clarity and commitment.

Here's what helps:

- A defined concept with a clear target customer

- A working prototype or recipe (even a rough one)
- Realistic expectations around production and pricing
- A willingness to adapt and receive feedback

Being early-stage is fine. Being unprepared is not.

TWG's Role in the Incubator Process

At TWG Consulting, we've worked with entrepreneurs inside and outside of incubator environments — including my ongoing involvement with Rutgers Food Innovation Center, one of the country's most respected programs.

We help founders:

- Refine their concept before they ever step into a shared kitchen
- Navigate ingredient sourcing and compliance from day one
- Prepare for meetings with co-packers, investors, and buyers
- Create production systems that can scale without chaos

Whether you're entering an incubator, working with a co-manufacturer, or flying solo — having the right guide by your side can make the difference between spinning your wheels and building real traction.

You've Got the Concept. Let's Make It Real.

You've taken the time to map out your idea, challenge your assumptions, and think through the hard parts most founders ignore. That puts you ahead. Now it's time to bring your product to life — with fewer setbacks, stronger systems, and a clear path to scale.

Book a Complimentary Strategy Call

Get personalized guidance from Certified Master Chef Thomas Griffiths. Whether you're refining a recipe, solving for production, or preparing for growth, this session is built around your next step — not a cookie-cutter template.

BOOK NOW

Join dozens of successful food entrepreneurs who've trusted Chef Tom to bring their vision to life.

Let's take the guesswork out of your launch — and help you build something that lasts.