

## Public Health Risks in Informal Fresh Cheese Commerce at Goiânia Street Markets

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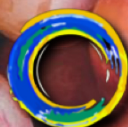
Street markets play a significant role in local commerce and culture, providing consumers with a meaningful experience through the offering of various products, among which fresh cheeses stand out. However, due to the informal nature of this commerce, it is not possible to ensure effective sanitary inspection that guarantees food safety, posing a health risk to consumers as it contributes to the transmission of foodborne pathogens. Based on this, the present study aimed to analyze the general hygienic and sanitary aspects of street markets in Goiânia-GO, as well as the points of sale of fresh cheeses, and to profile cheese consumers in these locations, assessing their perceptions of health risks caused by these foods. Sixteen markets from different regions of Goiânia were examined, and fresh cheese selling points were evaluated in 15, totaling 42 fresh cheese selling points and 160 consumers interviewed. Among the markets visited, it was noted that the majority, 87.5% (n=14), were itinerant and lacked sanitary infrastructure, as 56% (n=9) of the markets had no restrooms, and none (100%) had sinks with running water or trash bins. Garbage collection was performed after closure in only 75% (n=12) of them. Furthermore, considering a public health concern, the presence of vectors and urban pests was observed in 68.8% (n=11) of the markets, in addition to the sale of live animals in 18.8% (n=3). Regarding the points of sale, it was found that in 38 stalls (90.5%), fresh cheeses were exposed at ambient temperature during sale, and 33 stalls (78.6%) did not display labels on the cheeses, including relevant information such as expiration dates. Only 13 sellers (31%) reported producing their own cheeses, among these, 10 (23.8%) used raw milk to produce the cheeses. In 34 stalls (81%) there were no products for hand antisepsis, and during sales, 83.3% (n=35) of sellers handled both cheeses and money/credit card machines simultaneously. Interviews with sellers revealed a lack of courses or training on good manufacturing and food handling practices in 81% (n=34), while only 19% (n=8) reported having such experience. From the consumers' perspective, 59.3% (n=95) consider the hygienic and sanitary conditions of the markets to be regular; 32.5% (n=52) consider them excellent, and 7.5% (n=12) consider them poor. According to 88% (n=55), the markets need improvements, as the lack of cleanliness is a factor highlighted by 23.75% (n=38) of consumers. Regarding the consumption of uninspected cheeses, 73.75% (n=118) reported consuming this food, and when asked if such products could pose any risk to human health, 56.25% (n=90) denied any connection, while 40.62% (n=65) believed there is a risk, and 3.12% (n=5) did not know how to respond. In summary, the lack of infrastructure, as well as the precarious hygienic and sanitary conditions, combined with the lack of knowledge by both vendors and consumers about food safety and quality, highlight sanitary vulnerability and raise public health concerns.



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