

JTS Johanson Transportation Service

Freight Industry Guidebook

Topical insights from JTS Thought Leaders

10 Things Ask When Choosing a 3PL to Manage Your Food Supply Chain.

By Jeff Mosqueda, VP of Corporate Sales

Choosing the right third-party logistics (3PL) provider for your food and beverage shipments is a decision that affects product quality, customer satisfaction and your bottom line. It deserves an organized evaluation plan and a clear set of criteria for comparing providers side by side.

Here are the top 10 things to look for, along with questions to ask during the interview process.

1. Longevity and Financial Strength

Q: ***How long have you been in business, and how did you handle past market swings?***

3PLs that have served the food industry for decades, under consistent leadership, tend to be more reliable. They understand what it takes to manage food shipments safely, and they have the financial backing to weather the economy's peaks and valleys.

Also ask:

- What industry certifications, awards and ratings do you hold?
- How do you demonstrate financial stability?

2. Relevant Experience

Q: ***Have you worked with other food and beverage companies, and can you share references?***

A 3PL that knows your industry will anticipate requirements before they become problems. Look for a proven track record with customers like you.

Also ask:

- How many customers do you serve in our food specialty area?
- Do you follow FDA food transport rules and best practices?
- Will you support our seal policy?
- What are your Blue Book Services/Red Book Credit Services ratings?
- Which associations do you join and trade shows do you attend?

3. Freight Solution Options

Q: ***Which modes do you offer, and how do you decide which one fits a shipment?***

A good 3PL doesn't recommend the same mode for every load. It combines methods to keep your freight safe and on time, and it has the flexibility to adjust when plans change.

Also ask:

- Do you offer dry and temperature-controlled truckload, LTL, rail/intermodal, air and ocean freight?
- Can you provide labor, manage our logistics operations or help find us warehouse space?

4. Capacity Coverage

Q: ***How do you secure capacity when the market tightens?***

Any 3PL can find trucks in a loose market. The real test is a capacity crunch, when strong carrier relationships and committed lanes keep freight moving.

Also ask:

- How many carriers are in your network?
- Do you have committed lanes or guaranteed-capacity agreements with your core carriers?
- What tools (load boards, carrier apps, or a TMS) do you use to find available trucks and price loads accurately?,
- Share a real example of covering freight during a capacity crunch?

5. Carrier Compliance and Monitoring

Q: ***How do you vet carriers, and what authority, bonding and insurance do you carry?***

A 3PL with a dedicated carrier relations team can make sure only qualified carriers handle your freight, protecting your interests.

Also ask:

- What does your carrier vetting process look like?
- How do you monitor carrier ratings and safety scores, and how often is that information updated?
- May we see your bond and insurance certificates?

6. Technology

Q: ***What will we see through your technology, and can it connect to our systems?***

Some 3PLs invest more in technology than others, and it shows. The right tools save time, improve efficiency and reduce costs, especially when they integrate with your systems and adapt to your requirements.

Also ask:

- Does your TMS integrate the latest in AI technology and third-party integrations? Please explain this.
- Can you send and receive orders, changes and confirmations via EDI?
- Does your system automate invoicing, document capture and reporting on load volumes, on-time performance and other key metrics?

© 2026 Johanson Transportation Service. All rights reserved.

MC#159429 OTI#051756NF DOT#2212002



JTS Johanson Transportation Service

Freight Industry Guidebook

Topical insights from JTS Thought Leaders

Also ask:

- Does your TMS integrate the latest in AI technology and third-party integrations? Please explain this.
- Can you send and receive orders, changes and confirmations via EDI?
- Does your system automate invoicing, document capture and reporting on load volumes, on-time performance and other key metrics?
- Can you customize forms to meet our needs?
- Do you use a transportation management system (TMS)? Can it route freight to the lowest-cost, best-service option, track shipments and alert us to pickup and delivery delays?
- Does it generate invoices, aging reports, billing documents and audit reports?
- Can we assign different security levels to different employees?

7. Safety and Security

Q: ***How do you prevent cargo theft and fraud?***

Cargo theft and fraud are growing risks across the industry. A strong 3PL has clear, documented safeguards and a plan for when something goes wrong.

Also ask:

- How do you verify carrier identity before tendering a load?
- What policies do you have in place to prevent and resolve claims?

8. Customer Service

Q: ***Who is our day-to-day contact, and how quickly do you respond?***

Good service should rank above every other criterion, because service failures affect everyone down the supply chain. Look for a 3PL with an ethical foundation that treats you with respect in every transaction, strives to exceed your expectations and constantly looks for ways to improve your efficiency and control costs.

Also ask:

- Do you offer 24/7 access to customer service staff?
- If our volume justifies it, will you assign a dedicated customer service representative to our account?
- How do you handle problems such as delays, damage and claims? Can you give an example?

9. Pricing and Contract Terms

Q: ***How is your pricing structured, and what are the contract terms?***

The lowest rate isn't always the best value. Make sure you understand the full cost of doing business and how flexible the agreement is.

Also ask:

- How do you handle accessorial charges and fuel surcharges?
- How long will you hold quoted pricing?
- Are there volume minimums, and what are the exit clauses?
- What ideas do you have to help us reduce costs?

10. Performance Measurement and Business Reviews

Q: ***Which KPIs do you track and report, and how often will we review performance together?***

Trust in a 3PL's promise to deliver should rest on more than its word. A strong partner backs up its performance with measurable results and reviews them with you regularly.

Also ask:

- May we review your performance reports for on-time pickups and deliveries, and for accepted and rejected shipments?
- How often will we hold business reviews, and what improvement plans come out of them?

The Bottom Line

The right 3PL saves you time, streamlines your supply chain and lowers your costs. Weigh each provider on all of these factors because intangibles like service and reliability can matter more than the lowest rate.

The selection process takes effort, but it sets your company up for a long and successful partnership.

For more information on choosing the right 3PL, contact us at (800) 742-2053.

© 2026 Johanson Transportation Service. All rights reserved.

MC#159429 OTI#051756NF DOT#2212002