

Guidance for Starting and Operating a Food Business using a Shared Kitchen



General Overview

Shared kitchen popularity has grown with increased entrepreneurial interest in starting food businesses. Whether scaling up a cottage food business to a food establishment or testing a recipe for a Time and Temperature Control for Safety (TCS) product, a shared commercial kitchen space is an intermediate option for food business operators. This tool provides an overview of general recommendations to determine whether a shared kitchen will meet your needs.

Ultimately, before renting space and starting your business in a shared kitchen, **you will need to contact your local health department** to (a) determine licensing requirements and (b) ensure your production plan will meet the requirements of the local health department where you plan to operate.

What is a shared kitchen?

Shared commercial kitchens (also referred to as an incubator or commissary rent space to food producers). These spaces allow individuals and businesses, especially startup and small-scale food producers, to use commercial kitchen equipment licensed at that location to produce food for the public. Shared kitchens offer the equipment and spaces usually required for a food license, such as approved surfaces, refrigeration, ware-washing facilities, handwashing sinks, and any approved equipment. **Shared kitchens can be organized into two categories:**

- 1) **primary function** as a business is to offer commercial kitchen space for multiple users, or
- 2) primary function is as a regular food business, but the business allows user(s) to utilize kitchen space during off hours as a **secondary function**.

Primary Function

A shared kitchen facility whose primary function is to serve multiple food business operators may provide services, such as onsite dry and cooler/freezer storage, grey water disposal for mobile food vendors, and office space, among other things. Depending on the operating agreement, the shared kitchen owner may require each user to obtain separate licenses from their local health department or allow them to operate under the owner's license, with the owner assuming all liability.

Example

The Mainstreet Inspiration Kitchen is a commercial kitchen purposefully designed for multiple food business owners to be able to rent space and equipment.

Secondary Function

A facility whose secondary function is offering commercial kitchen space outside of its food establishment hours will likely require a separate food establishment license for user(s). It is important to remember that equipment may be specialized, so shared kitchen user(s) should ensure it is adequate for their needs.

Example

The Sunnyside Diner is a restaurant that operates 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday-Saturday and rents its commercial kitchen space out during its off hours – 5 p.m. to 7 a.m. and all-day Sunday.

General Facility Requirements

From the start, shared kitchen user(s) and owners must set out to establish clear expectations to ensure food safety and the overall success of the food business. This includes creating a **shared kitchen agreement** defining which parties are responsible for the maintenance of the physical facility, cleaning and sanitizing of food equipment, and supplying of goods. **Establish a plan and contact the Local Health Department where the shared kitchen is located to learn about operating requirements and permitting/license options.**

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Shared kitchen user(s) and owners must also outline **operating plans that include the dates and times in which each food business will operate**. This information should be communicated to the **appropriate local health department**.

Cleaning	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are multiple operators allowed at the same time?
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are measures implemented to control cross-contamination for shared equipment and multiple operators?
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Does the owner have expected cleaning procedures in place? Is training provided for specific cleaning/sanitizing of equipment?
Equipment	<input type="checkbox"/>	What type and size of equipment is available for your business to adequately make and store your products? Equipment to consider is cold holding, hot holding, and cooling.
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Is the equipment certified? Is it easily cleanable?
	<input type="checkbox"/>	If allowed to bring your personal equipment, do they have proper storage to ensure they remain clean and undamaged?
Owners	<input type="checkbox"/>	Do the owners have the proper licenses to operate?
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Have they completed the required trainings for Illinois?
Permits / Licenses	<input type="checkbox"/>	Does this facility have a building permit from the city or local authority to operate?
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Does the facility have an appropriate license or permit from the local health department to operate as a food establishment?
Pest Control	<input type="checkbox"/>	Does the facility have a pest control program in place?
Scheduling	<input type="checkbox"/>	Is there a schedule in place for both parties that is shared with the local health department?
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are you allowed to use the kitchen during regular business hours?
Security	<input type="checkbox"/>	Who has access to the building?
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are you able to keep your products that are left in the building secure?
Special Processes	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are you performing any special processes that would require additional approval from the Local Health Department that oversees the shared kitchen?
Storage	<input type="checkbox"/>	Is there adequate storage space (dry storage, finished product storage, cold holding, etc.) clearly labeled for the product?
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Does the operator get designated storage space that is secure?
Temperature Monitoring	<input type="checkbox"/>	Who monitors the cold holding units when not in use?
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are multiple operators allowed at the same time?
Water and Wastewater Disposal	<input type="checkbox"/>	What type of water is used in the kitchen?
	<input type="checkbox"/>	If it does not operate on municipal water and sewer:
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Does it have a water well that needs to be tested?
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Has the septic system been properly maintained?
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Does their septic system keep up with the demand during peak hours of operation?