

Shared Use Kitchens: Building Maine's Food Security

The Shared Use Kitchen

There are a number of terms that are routinely used to describe food processing options: Shared Use Kitchen, Commercial Kitchen, Incubator Kitchen, Co-Packer, and Food Processing Facility. The Coalition has chosen to use **Shared Use Kitchen** because at the foundation of the various kitchen projects is a **public/private partnership** that envisions a number of uses for the facility having both public and private benefits.

A Shared Use Kitchen is a licensed facility where foods not suitable for home production (potentially hazardous foods) are produced; it is the intermediary step between a home kitchen and a large scale commercial processing facility. Shared Use Kitchens offer production and wholesale and/or retail sales outlets for individual entrepreneurs and provide a source of jobs and business development assistance along with space for public education and demonstrations.

The Need:

Over the years, Maine has lost significant commodity agriculture capacity as agricultural production has industrialized and small farms were replaced by large scale "Factory Farms". Gradually, support and infrastructure at the community level in the form of warehousing and distribution, input suppliers, equipment dealers, food processing facilities and cold storage has been lost.

Increased demand for locally grown and organic products nation-wide coincides with a rise in the number of farmers and land under cultivation here in Maine. In order to fully capitalize on this trend, however, the local infrastructure needs to be rebuilt.

Maine's Shared Use Kitchen initiatives will help fill the gap in food production facilities by providing local farmers and food entrepreneurs the opportunity to add value to agricultural products thus expanding the choices consumers have to "buy local".

Additionally, a Shared Use Kitchen will improve the viability of local agriculture, add to the profitability of farmers, and expand the market for Maine specialty food products.

Shared Use Kitchens will be located in "Service Center" communities with easy access by the regional farming/fishing community – the users of the facility - as well as close to consumers, allowing for the development of a critical mass of food entrepreneurs and related businesses that could aggregate raw agriculture products from the region more efficiently.

The Shared Use Kitchen is an integral part of the value chain between the producer of agriculture products and/or the seafood harvester and the consumer. Also part of that value chain are other processing, storage and distribution facilities, and wholesale and retail establishments.

Goal/Purpose:

The Coalition is working to establish a cluster of kitchen facilities, in conjunction with existing co-packers and other licensed kitchens, such as public school kitchens, that will meet the needs of users, add value to the local economy by expanding the number of food related businesses,

and create jobs. The Coalition seeks to build awareness, leverage expertise, and coordinate regional development, and encourage investment that will re-build Maine's food cluster infrastructure

Benefits:

The Shared Use Kitchen provides efficiencies and cost savings to food entrepreneurs by spreading the overhead costs for equipment, supplies, space and services over a number of users. By consolidating the licensing and inspection into one facility for multiple users, Shared Use Kitchens can streamline the food regulation process allowing federal, state, and local governments to more effectively monitor food processing and packaging. This has the potential to save money for the agencies involved. It also provides the stimulus to develop and implement more efficient and coherent policies on food regulations, bringing potential cost savings to producers, and ultimately, consumers.

Shared Use Kitchens can play a critical role in developing a **healthy, safe, and secure food supply** for Maine. Local food is healthier than food that is stored and shipped thousands of miles - as underscored by recent outbreaks of food related diseases and illnesses from imported foods. Local production and distribution facilities lend themselves to greater ease of local 'quality' controls and safety assurances. Purchasing local foods reduces 'food miles' and lowers the 'carbon footprint' of our food consumption. With a strong local food infrastructure, we can reduce in the long run the resources expended by state and federal governments on identifying and tracking national outbreaks of food related diseases and better able to contain a local outbreak quickly if one occurs.

Communities and individuals will benefit from a strengthened agriculture sector that preserves an open, working landscape, diminishes sprawl, and produces healthy foods.

A Few Facts:

Agriculture

Maine Ag Statistics	1997	2002	2005
Number of Farms	7,404	7,196	7,100
Acres in Farms	1,313,066	1,369,768	1,370,000

Over the years there has been a gradual decline in the number of farms in Maine but a gradual increase in the acres in farms. From 1997 to 2005 the number of farms has declined by 3%. However, during that same period the acres in farms increased by 4%. While we are gradually increasing our land based devoted to agriculture there is still a need to develop infrastructure like the shared use kitchen to help more people get into farming.

The biggest increase in farms currently is small diversified operations. Farms with value of sales less than \$2,500 increased from 2,978 in 1997 to 3,634 in 2002 or approximately 22%. Also, women as principal farm operators increased by 35% during that same period. These trends would indicate a need to expand the local infrastructure supporting agriculture, helping to ensure that these operations succeed and grow.

Health

In 2004, it was estimated that 23.4% of Maine's adult population was obese, with health related costs of approximately \$357 million. Diabetes in Maine is also significant with 7.4% of the adult population diagnosed with diabetes in 2000. It is also estimated that approximately 3.7% of the adult population may have diabetes but has not been diagnosed yet. Based on these estimates, approximately 108,000 Maine adults have diabetes. In 1999, death rates in Maine for heart disease and cancer were the highest in New England at 253 per 100,000 deaths for heart disease and 223 per 100,000 deaths for cancer.

There are a number of life style and environmental factors that contribute to these statistics. One of the most important is diet and the availability of fresh, healthy food. Having a network of shared use kitchens can help increase the availability of healthy local foods helping people address these health related problems.

Maine's Shared Use Coalition Organizations

These organizations are currently participating in the Coalition. Other groups, agencies, and organizations are welcome to become part of the Coalition and can join as the network expands.

York County Community Action Program (Saco Kitchen Project)
 York County Shelter (Saco Kitchen Project)
 Fairbanks School Neighborhood Association (Farmington Kitchen Project)
 Unity Barn Raisers
 Washington Hancock Community Agency (Bucksport Kitchen Project)
 Down East Business Alliance (Bucksport Kitchen Project)
 Town of Bucksport (Bucksport Kitchen Project)
 Cobscook Bay Resource Center (Eastport Kitchen Project)
 Connections Local Food Cooperative (Rumford and Dixfield Kitchen Projects)
 Women, Work, and Community
 Maine's Small Business Development Centers
 Maine Rural Partners
 University of Maine Dr. Mathew Highlands Pilot Plant
 University of Maine Cooperative Extension
 Threshold To Maine RC&D Area
 Time and Tide RC&D Area
 Down East RC&D Area
 Maine Department of Agriculture
 Maine Department of Community and Economic Development
 Maine Department of Health and Human Services
 Maine Department of Environmental Protection
 State Planning Office
 USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
 U.S. Food and Drug Administration
 Pemberton's Gourmet Foods

The Coalition is being coordinated by the Threshold To Maine Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Area. For more information about the Coalition and to get a list of participating organizations and groups, please contact the Threshold To Maine office.



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