



Extension News Column

*University of Alaska Fairbanks, Cooperative Extension Service, www.uaf.edu/ces/
fycit@uaf.edu, 907-474-5211, FAX 907-474-6885*

Contact: Debbie Carter, information officer, 907-474-5406, dscarter@alaska.edu

Author: Roxie Rodgers Dinstel, Tanana District Extension Faculty, HHFD

Small businesses are the base of our economy here in Alaska. In fact, 97% of all businesses are small businesses. Studies have shown that buying from an independent, locally owned business, significantly raises the number of times your money is used to make purchases from other local businesses or service providers, which strengthens the economic base of the community. Alaska based businesses are good for the economy and the long-term viability of this state.

Starting your own business can be both a terrifying and thrilling venture. For many, a small food business is a result of a lifelong dream, and for others they are fresh entrepreneurial start-ups. Whatever the case, small food businesses constitute a huge portion of the private owned companies in the world. The strength of these numbers show that the public is interested in buying from small, locally based food businesses. There are many ways to go about formulating your own commercial dream; however, what all small food businesses need to begin is a product and passion.

Here at Cooperative Extension we are working to help people begin those small businesses, in particular, food based businesses. Demand is high for locally produced foods, but the supply is somewhat limited. We'd love to help you launch that food based business.

Over the past few years, we have worked to develop a food product development kitchen to test those local foods. Now the purpose of that kitchen has expanded to support these new businesses.

Negotiating the road from idea to product is a daunting challenge. The original product is key, but is only the start. The idea must be turned into a product, tested, marketed, licensed, and finally a business plan must be developed. All these steps should take place before even one item can be sold.

Each product requires that the producer have certifications and licenses before you begin production. The cost of all those licenses and certifications starts at just over \$1000 according to CES research. The total cost is dependent upon what type of food product one wishes to market.

One of the challenges for many food producers is the requirement for a Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC)-approved kitchen to produce foods for sale. Cooperative Extension is making their food product development kitchen available for food production for an hourly rate. For many of us it is a perfect way to test a product before investing in production facilities that require a major investment.

In addition to the kitchen, new producers can get technical assistance from two of our very capable Cooperative Extension employees, Kate Idzorek and Coral Howe.

Kate is the food product development Research Technician. She oversees the kitchen, but also can help food producers negotiate the beginning of the food product development. She works with people on refining recipes, setting up production processes, can guide you through the licensing and certification processes, and provide you with nutrition labels for your product. She knows the rules that govern food production and can help you negotiate through the steps required to bring the product to market.

Coral Howe works with those of you who are starting businesses based on our Alaska wildberries. She is on a very specialized grant related to new berry businesses. She can help with marketing, packaging, nutrition and antioxidant information related to Alaska Wildberries, and other support related to launching that business.

UAF Cooperative Extension is committed to helping people develop food based businesses. Let us help as you start down that road. We don't always know all the answers, but keep close working relationships with those groups in the community that regulate businesses. To reach Kate, call her at 474-5391 or email her at kjidzorek@alaska.edu. Coral can be reached at 474-1512 or email her at cchowe@alaska.edu. Of course, I'm always willing to help wherever I can as well, 474-2426 or rrdinstel@alaska.edu.

Now is the time to think about starting the process. Working through the steps now can get you ready to produce those first products by the summer season.