

An Introduction to Shared-Use Commercial Kitchens¹

Matthew Krug and Sarah Ellis²

Background

The number of shared-use commercial kitchen facilities in Florida and the United States has increased in recent years. Many food entrepreneurs utilize these facilities to launch or expand their food businesses as a way to save on initial cost of investment and avoid having to build their own facilities. There are several different names or definitions used to describe these operations, which may lead to confusion for entrepreneurs interested in using such facilities. This document intends to provide basic definitions of several types of shared-use commercial kitchens and include other relevant information about these facilities in Florida.

What is a shared-use commercial kitchen?

The term commercial kitchen describes facilities that are designed and built to current code and sanitary standards with running water, appropriate plumbing, and surfaces that are suitable for food production. These facilities must meet minimum construction standards in the food preparation and adjacent areas so that food business operators can comply with state or federal regulations when processing food. Shared-use commercial kitchens often have multiple food preparation areas, cold and dry storage, professional-grade equipment, and an existing sanitation program so that multiple food businesses may operate simultaneously. Members can rent the existing infrastructure by hourly, daily, or monthly time blocks to establish and operate their food businesses (Meador McCausland et al. 2018).

Several terms are commonly used to describe shared-use commercial kitchens, such as incubator, accelerator, community kitchens, food hub, or food innovation centers. While these terms are nearly interchangeable, they may indicate subtle differences in kitchen model or objectives. Table 1 lists several definitions applicable to shared-use kitchen types.

Food Regulations and Permits

Regardless of the shared-use kitchen type, there is a common goal of allowing businesses to operate in compliance with applicable food safety regulations. In Florida, owners are required to register their food businesses with the Florida Department of Business and Professional Regulation (DBPR) or Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) and are subject to initial and subsequent inspections. Common businesses regulated by DBPR include restaurants, caterers, and temporary event vendors, while FDACS regulates retail and wholesale food processors.

There are several food regulations applicable to businesses depending on the type of food, method of sale, and average amount of annual sales. Usually small food businesses are either required to follow the FDA Food Code or Current Good Manufacturing Practices (CGMPs) found in 21 CFR 117 at a minimum. Shared-use kitchens are likely to have several different businesses operating simultaneously, meaning that multiple regulations may be enforced, and inspections executed from multiple agencies (i.e., DBPR

1. This document is FSHN20-41, one of a series of the Food Science and Human Nutrition Department, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date September 2020. Visit the EDIS website at <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu> for the currently supported version of this publication.
2. Matthew Krug, state specialized agent, food science, UF/IFAS Southwest Florida Research and Education Center, Immokalee, FL; and Sarah Ellis, Extension agent I, family and consumer sciences, UF/IFAS Extension Citrus County, Lecanto, FL.

and FDACS) within the same facility. Although shared-use kitchen owners may provide guidance, it is up to each individual business owner to obtain the necessary permitting so that their business may operate out of the facility.

Additional Services

Shared-use commercial kitchen owners or employees may provide additional services to members to guide them through the steps of opening and growing a food business. Potential opportunities include food-safety trainings, business classes, marketing and distribution opportunities, legal and financial advising, and packaging or branding services. Facilities may be owned or have a partnership with a university, which allows easy access for experts to implement these trainings or services (i.e., Extension education). Privately owned facilities may have the resources to provide these services or could rely upon outside sources (i.e., consultants). The level of guidance and services offered by each facility will depend on the needs of the clientele and the resources available.

The level of guidance and services offered will vary between facilities. However, this seems to be the best distinguishing factor between the facility types listed in Table 1, although the use of a term such as “accelerator” in the name of a facility does not always indicate they follow the model described in the definition. Some facilities only follow the basic commissary model, with the sole purpose of providing commercial kitchen space to interested business owners. This model could be adequate for someone with an established business whose limiting factor is the lack of commercial kitchen space. On the other hand, entrepreneurs in the beginning stages of operating a food business may rely upon the additional services an incubator, accelerator, or food hub provides.

While entrepreneurs are searching for a facility to house their food business, it is important for them to determine their needs, communicate with the facility owners or directors, and decide if their goals align with the resources the facility provides. Another item they should consider is whether the kitchen rental rates are within the financial means of their business. Facilities may rent out kitchen space in hourly, daily, or monthly blocks; entrepreneurs should select a facility that best meets the needs of their expected usage. Several shared-use commercial kitchens around Florida and the United States provide options to food entrepreneurs. A list of current shared-use commercial kitchen facilities in Florida is found in Table 2.

Benefits of Using a Shared-Use Commercial Kitchen

When starting a business, food entrepreneurs face several start-up costs, such as purchasing or building a facility, furnishing the facility with commercial equipment, supplying tools/utensils, and making down payments on utilities. The costs to build out a commercial kitchen in an existing space can run up to \$100–\$300 per square foot (Meader McCausland et al. 2018), which may be unworkable for clientele with limited financial means. Shared-use commercial kitchens can help reduce this financial burden for small food businesses.

Ultimately, shared-use facilities provide adequate commercial kitchen space, with minimal capital investment, so local food entrepreneurs may try out new products in the market and limit the effect of potential product failure. Furthermore, the resources, services, and networking opportunities these facilities may provide will ease the process of launching a new food business and may catalyze the growth of the business.

Additional Resources

FDACS

Minimum Construction Standards: https://www.fdacs.gov/content/download/64038/file/Food_Establishment_Minimum_Construction_Standards.pdf

Retail Food Permit Info: <https://www.fdacs.gov/Business-Services/Food-Establishments/Retail-Food-Establishment-Permit>

Wholesale Food Permit Info: <https://www.fdacs.gov/Business-Services/Food-Establishments/Wholesale-Manufactured-Food-Establishment-Permit>

DBPR

Food Service Permit Info: <https://www.myfloridalicense.com/intentions2.asp?chBoard=true&boardid=200&SID=>

Table 1. Shared-Use Commercial Kitchen Type Definitions

Commissary	An established commercial kitchen that allows food businesses to rent kitchen time to prepare and store food. May also offer mobile food vendors a place to acquire potable water and dispose of wastewater.
Incubator Kitchen	An entrepreneurial support organization with commercial kitchen facilities focused on advancing the growth of small and emerging food businesses. Often these facilities offer trainings or services to guide members as they open and grow a small food business.
Accelerator Kitchen	Typically, a kitchen facility with a short-term program designed to help food businesses with high growth potential. Members receive guidance and networking opportunities, and in return, the accelerator may obtain a percentage of equity in the company.
Community Kitchen	A shared-use kitchen that serves the community at large and is not for the exclusive use of for-profit businesses. May apply to kitchens found in facilities such as churches or community centers.
Food Hub	An aggregation and distribution center for locally produced foods. May include a shared-use kitchen for food processing, but also a retail market (e.g., coffee shop) where clientele may sell their products.
Food Innovation Center	A multiprogram facility that offers technical services to entrepreneurs. May or may not include kitchen space for rent.
Definitions derived from AFDO (2017), Meader McCausland et al. (2018), and Topaloff (2014).	

References

- Association of Food and Drug Officials (AFDO). 2017. "Guidelines for Incubator Kitchens." https://www.afdo.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Guidelines_for_Incubator_Kitchens_acc_updated_2017.pdf. Accessed 25 Mar 2022.
- Meader McCausland, D., R. Miller, A. Colpaart, and M. King. 2018. *Shared Kitchen Toolkit: A Practical Guide to Planning, Launching and Managing a Shared-Use Commercial Kitchen*. The Food Corridor. <https://www.thefoodcorridor.com/resources/>. Accessed 26 Mar 2020.
- Topaloff, A. 2014. "The Shared-Use Kitchen Planning Toolkit." *Leopold Center Pubs and Papers*. 33. <https://dr.lib.iastate.edu/handle/20.500.12876/53690>.

Table 2. Shared-Use Commercial Kitchens in Florida

Business Name	Location, City	Phone Number	Website
Almendra's Kitchen	Orlando	321-348-7386	www.almendraskitchen.com
Beaver Street Commissary	Jacksonville	904-655-6603	www.beaverstreetcommissary.com
Catapult Kitchen Incubator	Lakeland	863-940-9660	catapultlakeland.com/kitchen/
Central Florida Commissary	Oviedo	407-917-1441	
Citrus County Community Kitchen	Lecanto	352-527-7540	www.citrusbocc.com/departments/community_services/parks___recreation/community_building_rentals/community_kitchen.php
Commercial Kitchen Fort Myers	Fort Myers	239-462-3589	www.commercialkitchenfortmyers.com
Denise's Commissary Kitchen	Groveland	863-236-8590	denisecommissarykitchen.business.site/
East End Market	Orlando	321-236-3316	www.eastendmkt.com
EZ Pro Kitchen	Tampa	813-530-5776	www.ezprokitchen.com
Florida Chefs Workshop	St. Petersburg	727-308-1256	www.floridachefsworkshop.com
Florida Culinary Accelerator @ Immokalee	Immokalee	239-249-5911 Ext.1	www.theculinaryaccelerator.com
Food Hub	Miami	786-599-6484	www.food-hub.co
Green Leaf Kitchen	Longwood	407-790-7825	www.greenleafkitchen.net
Healthy Food Factory	Boca Raton	561-394-7466	www.healthyfoodfactory.com/
Jax Kitchen	Jacksonville	904-619-5872	www.jax-kitchen.com
Kissimmee Kitchen Share	Kissimmee	407-398-5245	
KitchenSHARE	Tallahassee	850-577-1615	www.kitchensharetlh.com/
Let's Eat Fresh	Ocala	352-299-5233	www.letseatfresh.net/
Let's Cook Shared Kitchen	Tampa	813-260-4604	www.letscooksharedkitchen.com
My-Rent-A-Kitchen	Clearwater	813-376-9185	www.myrentakitchen.com
Orlando Caterers & Commissary	Orlando	407-745-5636	www.orlandofcaterers.com
Pasco County One Stop Shop	Dade City	352-521-1254	www.pascocountyfl.net/3581/One-Stop-Shop---Incubator-Kitchen
Prokitchen Hub	Tampa	727-244-5368	www.prokitchenhubtampa.com
Pro Kitchen Hub	Sunrise	954-812-6698	www.prokitchenhub.com
Rise Commercial Kitchen Share	Sarasota		www.risekitchen.com/
Something So Yummy	Naples	239-449-6068	commercialkitchennaples.com/
StartUP FIU Food Incubator	Miami	305-348-7156	www.startup.fiu.edu/food/food-incubator/
Sunshine Kitchen	Fort Pierce	772-247-2800	www.stlucieco.gov/departments-services/a-z/sunshine-kitchen
Tampa Bay Kitchen	Tampa	727-432-2317	www.tampabaykitchen.com/
The Kitchen 24	Oldsmar	727-940-2403	www.thekitchen24.com
Working Food	Gainesville	352-260-4458	www.workingfood.org
Your Culinary Place LLC	Sarasota	941-922-9222	www.yourculinaryplace.com