



CENTER *for* RURAL AFFAIRS

RURAL FOOD BUSINESS TOOLKIT

A resource for growers, processors and food business owners.

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➤ Rural food businesses are growing. This toolkit from the Center for Rural Affairs provides resources to help rural food businesses succeed.

The sections of this toolkit address steps throughout the supply chain that gets products into consumers' hands. The resources are primarily intended for value-added food processing business owners, and are also useful for commercial kitchen operators, farmers, distributors and anyone with an interest in great food and local businesses.



■ Lyons, Neb., is home to the Center for Rural Affairs main office, located on the small town's iconic Main Street.

About the Center for Rural Affairs

➤ Established in 1973, the Center for Rural Affairs is a private, nonprofit organization with a mission to establish strong rural communities, social and economic justice, environmental stewardship and genuine opportunity for all while engaging people in decisions that affect the quality of their lives and the future of their communities.

The Center leads a variety of food system projects, addressing sustainable farm production, community gardens, farmers markets, farm to school and more. Through our work, we have identified interest and opportunity in rural food business expansion through value-added processing.

This toolkit was developed alongside a project aiding rural food entrepreneurs in northeast Nebraska, which provided in-person instruction and support. This project and toolkit are funded by United States Department of Agriculture Rural Business Development.

Section I: Commercial and shared-use kitchens

➤ There are many commercial kitchens in schools, churches, meeting spaces, senior centers and more throughout rural communities. These kitchens can become community resources and provide opportunities to cultivate food processing and preparation businesses when they are opened up for shared use. The following resources can help commercial kitchens allow for shared use and help food producers access shared kitchens. *Note: For the purpose of this guide, we're defining a commercial kitchen as a licensed shared-use kitchen, or cooking area established to make food for selling purposes.*

- Licensing for both kitchens and users is required. Contact your state inspector (http://www.nda.nebraska.gov/fscp/foods/inspector_map.jpg) to get started. If you have a kitchen you'd like to license, often the inspector is willing to come survey it and let you know what is needed to pass inspection.
- If there is a kitchen in your community that is already licensed, contact your state inspector about getting a license to use it. This could be a church, school, community center, senior center or business. Be sure to talk to owners of the location about using it.



Participants in the Rural Food Business Growth project took a tour at Miss Molly's in Wayne, Neb., to learn more about their business, coffee shop and their two licensed kitchen spaces.

Renting a shared-use kitchen in eastern Nebraska

- **Nielsen Community Center** (<http://www.ci.west-point.ne.us/NielsenRates2009.htm>), West Point, Neb.
- **Miss Molly's Coffee Company** (<http://www.missmollyscoffeecompany.com/home.html>), Wayne, Neb. (Note: this location has both standard and certified allergen-free kitchens available for rent.)
- **Kuper Farms** (<https://www.facebook.com/kuper.farms>), Norfolk, Neb.
- **Our Lady of Fatima Worship Center** Macy, Neb. (future)
- **Pilger Community Center** (<https://sites.google.com/site/pilgerne/pilger-community-center>), Pilger, Neb. (future)
- **Cafe Gratitude & Bakery** (<http://www.gratitudecafebakery.com/rent-gratitude.html>), Lincoln, Neb.
- **Launch Commercial Kitchen at The Salsa Works**, La Vista, Neb.
- **"F" Street Community Center** (<http://lincoln.ne.gov/city/parks/fstreet/rentals.htm>), Lincoln, Neb.
- **No More Empty Pots** (<http://www.nmepomaha.org>), Omaha, Neb. (Coming soon. For more information, email info@nmepomaha.org)
- **Veterans Memorial Building** (<https://www.facebook.com/Nebraska-City-Veterans-Memorial-Building-Project-1437961759564082/>), Nebraska City, Neb. (future)
- **Other potential shared-use kitchens in Omaha** (<https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?ll=41.282451%2C-95.853996&spn=0.122806%2C0.307274&hl=en&msa=0&z=12&ie=UTF8&mid=1AtejEPv4PXHA9p1m796VRHLRuNw>)

Kitchen equipment and other resources for building your own kitchen

- **Shared-use kitchen planning toolkit** (<https://www.leopold.iastate.edu/files/pubs-and-papers/2014-09-shared-use-kitchen-planning-toolkit.pdf>) - Leopold Center, Iowa State University Extension and Iowa Food System Working Group resource
- **How to Design a Small Commercial Kitchen** (<http://smallbusiness.chron.com/design-small-commercial-kitchen-13896.html>)
- Take a **virtual tour** (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-wehmMoazx0>) of a small commercial kitchen in a home
- **Webstaurant Store** (<http://www.webstaurantstore.com>), online
- **Kelly Equipment**, Omaha, Neb.
- **Hockenbergs** (<https://www.hockenbergs.com>), Omaha and Lincoln, Neb.
- **Lawler Fixture Company** (<http://www.lawlerfixturecompany.com>), Sioux City, Iowa
- **Rapids Wholesale Equipment Company** (<http://rapidswholesale.com>), online



Miss Molly's in Wayne, Neb., features a certified gluten and allergen free kitchen for those who have rented the space to create allergen free foods.

Section II: Value-added processing

- There are many reasons to get into value-added processing, the combining or transformation of raw food ingredients to create a product that is easier to use and market. For small farm and garden businesses, processing can create a high-value product that increases the business's profit margins. In farm to school programs, minimally processed foods are easier for schools to use throughout the year, making them more marketable for the school cafeteria. In this section, you'll find resources for fruit, vegetable and meat processing.

Fruit and vegetable processing

- **University of Nebraska–Lincoln Food Processing Center** (<http://fpc.unl.edu>) - can assist small food businesses in scaling up, providing food testing, labeling and regulatory consulting, product and process development
- **Sustainable Vegetable Processing in the Midwest** (http://nisa.cals.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/SCRIreport_2page_FINAL.pdf) - a report from the Midwest Food Processors Association
- **Frozen Local: Strategies for Freezing Locally Grown Produce for the K-12 Marketplace** (<http://iatp.org/blog/201212/frozen-local-how-about-it>) - an Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy resource and report (http://www.iatp.org/files/2012_12_11_FreezingReport_JB_web.pdf).
- **Iowa Choice Harvest** (<http://www.iowachoiceharvest.com>) - a unique farmer-led model that has expanded its private label and co-packing services to farms within the region. Depending on your farm's size and needs, this might be a good option to get your fruits and vegetables to processing for wholesale, institutional and retail sales.

Meat processing

- **Niche Meat Processors Assistance Network** (<http://www.nichemeatprocessing.org>) - a network and info hub for people and organizations who want small meat processors to thrive. The network offers tools and information for small processors and the farmers, marketers and meat buyers who depend on them.
 - **Webinars and case studies** (<http://www.nichemeatprocessing.org/webinars-and-case-studies>)
 - **Peer consulting** (<http://www.nichemeatprocessing.org/peer-consulting>)
 - **State help/find a processor** (<http://www.nichemeatprocessing.org/state-help>)

Section III: Distribution

➤ Growing businesses often need new distribution and marketing avenues to reach customers. These distribution resources can help you market and sell your food. In eastern Nebraska, these distributors and aggregators can help get your products to larger markets.

- **Kuper Farms** (<https://www.facebook.com/kuper.farms>) - Norfolk, Neb., retail store providing local foods from northeast Nebraska and southeast South Dakota
- **Nebraska Food Cooperative** (<https://www.nebraskafood.org>) - online, statewide - NFC is a marketing and distribution service designed to improve market access for farmer producers and local food access for consumers. Producers (farmers and ranchers) across Nebraska grow fresh food and list it on the NebraskaFood.org website for wholesale and retail sales and delivery.
- **Lone Tree Foods** (<http://www.lonetreefoods.com/how-it-works/>) - based in Crete, Neb., wholesale in eastern Nebraska and western Iowa
- **Tomato Tomato** (<http://tomatotomato.org>) - Omaha, Neb. - farmers market, large multi-farm Community Supported Agriculture, wholesale, direct sales
- **FarmTable Procurement and Delivery** (<https://www.facebook.com/FarmtableDeliveryIowa/>) - based in Harlan, Iowa, wholesale in eastern Nebraska and western Iowa, has future plans for light processing services



FarmTable Procurement & Delivery's truck is pictured at their warehouse in Harlan, Iowa, where they gather local food, do light packaging and deliver to restaurants and schools.

Section IV: Business incubation

➤ Incubators are highly flexible combinations of business development processes, infrastructure and people designed to nurture new and small businesses. Incubators help these businesses survive and grow through the difficult and vulnerable early stages of development. In this section, you'll find existing and planned incubators in Nebraska, along with examples from other states.

- **Food Entrepreneur Assistance** (<http://fpc.unl.edu/feap>) at the **University of Nebraska–Lincoln Processing Center** (http://fpc.unl.edu/small_business) on Innovation Campus, Lincoln, Neb. A source for customized assistance in all phases of establishing a food business. The program also provides services long distance. (Seminars include Recipe to Reality and Product to Profit [http://fpc.unl.edu/small_business].)
- **Southeast Community College Business incubation and coaching** (<https://www.southeast.edu/entrepreneurship/businessincubationandcoaching/>), Lincoln, Neb.
- **No More Empty Pots** (<http://www.nmepomaha.org>), Omaha, Neb. future culinary incubator and commercial kitchen site
- **Veterans Memorial Building** (<https://www.facebook.com/Nebraska-City-Veterans-Memorial-Building-Project-1437961759564082/>), Nebraska City, Neb., future culinary incubator and commercial kitchen site
- **Twin Cities Economic Development** (<http://tcdne.org>), Scottsbluff-Gering, Neb., future culinary incubator and community commercial kitchen site
- **Omaha World-Herald feature and listings on Incubators & Accelerators** (http://www.omaha.com/special_sections/outlook/accelerators-incubators-help-boost-startups/article_97005ca0-1949-57e6-87bc-21fc4df9adba.html)
- **Rutgers Food Business Incubator and Innovation Center listings** (<http://foodinnovation.rutgers.edu/incubatorlinks.html>)
- **The Food Corridor** (<http://www.thefoodcorridor.com>) - tools for kitchens and food businesses
- **Square One Kitchens** (<http://squareonekitchens.com>), Fargo, N.D.
- **Wisconsin Innovative Kitchen** (<http://www.wisconsininnovationkitchen.com>), Mineral Point, Wis.



During a kick-off event for the Center for Rural Affairs' Rural Food Business Growth project project, tours were given at the Nielsen Center in West Point, Neb., featuring its commercial kitchen spaces for rent.

Section V: Food safety

➤ Food production requires solid food safety practices. Here are several reputable sources for food safety training and practices.

- **Purple Pitchfork** (<http://www.purplepitchfork.com>) - Chris Blanchard's Post-Harvest Handling and Business Tools for farmers
- **Wholesale Success** (<http://www.familyfarmed.org/publications/wholesalesuccess/>) - Post-Harvest Handling and Food Safety publication
- **Nebraska Department of Agriculture Safe Food Handler Practices and Conditions** (http://www.nda.nebraska.gov/publications/foods/safe_food.html)
- **Nebraska Department of Agriculture Food Safety Resources** (<http://food.unl.edu/documents/GAP%20NebGuide%20G2020.pdf>)
- **Good Agricultural Practices (GAP)** (<http://gaps.cornell.edu>) - University of Nebraska Extension resource
- **GroupGAP** (<https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/auditing/groupgap>) - USDA resource, Group-GAP makes food safety certification accessible for small and middle-sized producers by allowing farmers, food hubs and other marketing organizations to work together to undergo GAP certification as a group.
- **National Good Agricultural Practices Program** (<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2041&context=extensionhist>) - an online course, Cornell University resource
- **Storing Fresh Fruits & Vegetables** (<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2041&context=extensionhist>) - University of Nebraska Extension resource



Retail space and signage located at Tomato Tomato in Omaha, Neb., a multi-farm Community Supported Agriculture and year round farmers market. Tomato Tomato helps business owners with distribution and with getting products to larger markets.



Section VI: Networks and other tools

➤ Joining a network will help you learn more about others' experiences. By connecting with others, you'll learn about common challenges and successes, and you'll find inspiration to move your business forward. In this section, you'll find networks, centers and additional tools available as resources.

- [Rural Enterprise Assistance Program training events and online training](http://www.cfra.org/reap/events) (<http://www.cfra.org/reap/events>)
- [National Good Food Network](http://www.ngfn.org) (<http://www.ngfn.org>) - Wallace Center Resource and list serve
- [Cool Tools](http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/cool_tools) (http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/cool_tools) from the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture
- [Growing Nebraska Businesses](http://eship.unl.edu/category/growing-nebraska-businesses) (<http://eship.unl.edu/category/growing-nebraska-businesses>) - Community Vitality Initiative from University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension
- [NICK \(Network for Incubator & Commissary Kitchens\)](https://www.facebook.com/groups/NICKitchens/) (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/NICKitchens/>) - request access
- [Northeast Nebraska Local Food Group](https://www.facebook.com/groups/NortheastNebLocalFood/) (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/NortheastNebLocalFood/>) - helpline and network for buyers and sellers
- [Nebraska Association of Meat Processors](http://www.namponline.com) (<http://www.namponline.com>)
- [Niche Meat Processors Assistance Network](http://www.nichemeatprocessing.org) (<http://www.nichemeatprocessing.org>)
- [Nebraska Fruit & Vegetable Growers Association](https://www.facebook.com/Nebraska-Fruit-and-Vegetable-Growers-Association-254623084768/) (<https://www.facebook.com/Nebraska-Fruit-and-Vegetable-Growers-Association-254623084768/>)
- [Nebraska MarketMaker](https://ne.foodmarketmaker.com) (<https://ne.foodmarketmaker.com>)
- [American Fruit and Vegetable Processors and Growers Coalition](http://www.americanfruitandvegetable.org/home.html) (<http://www.americanfruitandvegetable.org/home.html>)

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