

From Lard to Mustard Making Value Added Products at the Battenkill Kitchen

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Take a trip to a farmer's market or a local food store and you will see locally processed products. Have you ever wondered how and where the product was made? Making a processed food product for retail sale can be a long process, there is recipe testing, cost analysis, labeling, and processor licensing. Then you need a place to process the product which meets Ag and Market approval. As part of the Cornell Cooperative Extension Agricultural Economic Development (AED) Program of Saratoga and Washington Counties, we investigated the needs and identified a potential place to have a shared use kitchen available to food processors.

A shared-use kitchen is a kitchen shared by many different processors. In this case, a shared-use kitchen has commercial equipment a processor can rent by the hour to make a product. The model is ideal when a new business does not have the money to invest in building a full scale commercial kitchen in order to process their product properly and safely. By renting the kitchen, a producer can grow slowly and develop their business.

The Battenkill Kitchen

In 2002, the new jail in Washington County was being built. This meant the historic courthouse and jail in Salem, Washington County was going to be empty. Salem community members with a forward thinking approach decided to save the courthouse and jail and begin preservation of this historic landmark. Today, the Historic Salem Courthouse Preservation Association manages the Courthouse complex (www.salemcourthouse.org). Part of the complex was an 800 square foot kitchen. A group of volunteers came together and the end result was a new organization and a shared-use kitchen facility called the Battenkill Kitchen, Inc.

The Battenkill Kitchen, Inc. is a not-for-profit 501 (c) (3) organization and operates a commercially equipped kitchen available to farmers, individuals, businesses, and community organizations to process food products for individual use or retail sale. The kitchen is also available to hold educational programs, meetings, and special events.

The kitchen provides a space for individual producers to create and process their food product. The kitchen has been inspected by the New York State Department of Ag and Markets and is a perfect place to launch a small food business without a large capital investment.

BKI's goals include providing educational seminars and instruction in the areas of food preparation to local farmers and food producers; to provide area residents information and educational assistance in the creation and packaging of food products; to use the kitchen as a teaching platform to educate local school children about food; to provide the community with a kitchen to be used for community events.

The kitchen was equipped with the basic equipment needed to make meals for the prisoners, such as a six-burner gas range, a convection oven, two gas fired baking ovens, a high temperature

dishwasher, and a walk-in cooler. With a little paint and a lot of elbow grease, a group of dedicated volunteers began to transform the kitchen space into a usable shared-use kitchen. Fast forward to 2008, BKI has a fresh look and new equipment ready for any food processor to use. Thanks to funding from grants and donations, the kitchen boasts a new commercial tile floor, 40-gallon steam kettle, 40-quart stand mixer, digital scale, commercial food processor, and stainless steel food preparation tables

Who is Processing at the Battenkill Kitchen

The kitchen offers farmers an avenue to develop value added products to sell. Just talk to Jennifer Small, owner of Flying Pigs Farm, who renders leaf lard at the Battenkill Kitchen. Pork is Flying Pigs Farm's major product sold at the four Greenmarkets in New York City they attend twice a week. Their business goal is to maximize every cut of meat they sell. Leaf lard is a special piece of fat from the pig that is processed into the finest fat used for baking. By Flying Pigs Farm processing the fat into leaf lard, they now offer a ready to use product for their customers. Before, when they sold the fat unprocessed, it would have sold for \$4.00 per pound. By processing it for the customer, they are selling more leaf lard and getting \$6.25 per ½ pound. The leaf lard is seen as a value added product by the customer.

“Just as you need good tools on the farm with adequate power for a job,” Jennifer says, “the same holds true in the kitchen. The Battenkill Kitchen has the professional equipment to get a large job done right.”

Another product being processed at BKI is Jailhouse Mustard. This spicy mustard with an attitude was a long time coming from Mary Marschhauser of Hebron Hills Farm Products, Ltd. For years Mary Ann made the mustard for her family and friends and was encouraged to produce her mustard to sell. Now thanks to the BKI, Mary Ann can now sell her mustard at local and regional retail venues.

"I'm excited to finally be releasing my own product to market," says Mary Ann, "I have been making home-made mustard for over 20 years, sharing it with family, friends and neighbors who urged me to sell it to the public."

How to Get Started

Jailhouse Mustard, as well as many other processed products, came to be by attending workshops taught by the Northeast Center for Food Entrepreneurship through Cornell University. The AED program has hosted the *Recipe to Market* workshop which provides an overview of the steps and regulations regarding small-scale food production. Another *Recipe to Market* workshop is slated again for Friday, April 5 held in Salem.

The one-day seminar will provide future food entrepreneurs with knowledge of critical issues needing consideration before launching a food manufacturing business. Participants will leave the program with a good grounding in food business basics, and a road map pointing to where one needs to go before launching a food business. Anyone interested in developing a product should plan on attending the workshop.

Program topics to be covered include: What is an entrepreneur; market research and selection; business structure; product and process development; packaging and labeling; pricing and cost analysis; promotional material package; product introduction and sales; food safety and sanitation; and a tour of the Battenkill Kitchen.

How to Process at the Battenkill Kitchen

The first steps if you are interested in processing a food product is to contact the Northeast Center for Food Entrepreneurship (NCFE) at 315-787-2274 or necfe@nysaes.cornell.edu. NCFE provides comprehensive assistance to beginning and established food entrepreneurs. You will also want to secure your food processing license by contacting the Food Safety Department at the New York State Department of Ag and Markets at 1-800-554-4501. Once you have investigated these steps, contact the BKI about renting the kitchen at 518-854-3032.

BKI holds classes, events, and fundraisers in the BKI facility and also co-sponsors events by other organizations in the facility, as well as off-site. Visit BKI's website at www.battenkillkitchen.org for a full listing of equipment and details about the facility, upcoming events, classes, and processor user forms.

The Capital District-Saratoga region is fortunate to have the Battenkill Kitchen as a processing resource to produce your locally grown value added products.