

Home-to-Market Act Expands Options For Illinois' Growing Cottage Food Industry

April 30 2022 7:15 AM



URBANA – Illinois' Cottage Food Law allows food entrepreneurs, local producers, and home cooks to sell non-potentially hazardous homemade foods and drinks to the public. Prior to 2012, those foods had to be prepared in a licensed commercial kitchen, an expensive option for those running a small business.

Demand for locally produced food and a growing cottage food industry has spawned statewide conversations around food entrepreneurship, resulting in the [Home-to-Market Act](#), a set of legislative updates to the Cottage Food Law. The amendment, which went into effect Jan. 1, 2022, gives owners the opportunity to grow their business by expanding the direct-to-consumer venues through which they can sell.

Before this legislation passed, food operators could only sell homemade foods through farmers markets. Now, direct-to-consumer sales avenues also include fairs, festivals, public events, order pickup from the operator's home or farm, delivery to customer, and online sales within the state.

“It’s an exciting time to be in the cottage food industry,” says [Mary Liz Wright, University of Illinois Extension](#) nutrition and wellness educator.

Significant Cottage Food Law changes resulting from the Home-to-Market Act include:

- Point-of-sale avenues outside of farmers markets.
- Buttercream icing no longer prohibited.
- Clarification for acidified and fermented foods.
- Regulations and certification processes have become more standardized and consistent.

Wright and fellow Illinois Extension educator [Jenna Smith](#) have been instrumental in helping to refine these changes that promote innovation while retaining safe food preservation practices that minimize the risk of exposing the public to foodborne illnesses.

The two educators have been working closely with members of nearly 40 organizations and state agencies, including [Illinois Stewardship Alliance](#) and [Illinois Department of Public Health](#), to balance food safety recommendations with opportunities for local entrepreneurs to grow and thrive.

“Our role is to protect the health of the most people possible,” says Wright. “As proposals and suggestions around Cottage Food Law surface, we evaluate them against research-based food preservation guidelines.”

Wright says that the law’s focus has shifted since its 2012 inception. Instead of publishing a finite list of approved foods, it focuses on identifying 14 groups of potentially hazardous, prohibited foods that pose a greater risk of transmitting foodborne illness. This keeps public safety at the forefront but leaves the door open for entrepreneurial business growth.

“In the cottage food community, the artisan spirit is truly impressive,” says Smith. “The laws are there to protect those food innovators, as well as the public.”

View a complete list of [prohibited cottage foods](https://go.illinois.edu/CottageFoods) on Illinois Extension’s website: go.illinois.edu/CottageFoods.

Other foods may be permitted under certain circumstances, which may include [recipe testing](#) at a commercial lab, [acidifying low-acid products](#), providing a written [food safety plan](#) to the local health department, or [maintaining product refrigeration](#) throughout transport and holding.

Food operators are encouraged to reach out to their local [health department](#) or [Illinois Extension office](#) for guidance and clarification when in doubt.

Anyone preparing or packaging food for a home-based food operation must complete an [American National Standards Institute](#) accredited [Certified Food Protection Managers](#) course and exam. Once certified, the operator must register with their local health department, which requires filling out an application, listing the foods intended for sale, and paying any applicable fees.

Wright says that some health departments do not charge a registration fee, but those that do are capped at \$50.

Visit [Illinois Extension’s Cottage Food Operator checklist](#) for more information about preparing for a new cottage food business.

ABOUT EXTENSION: *Illinois Extension leads public outreach for University of Illinois by translating research into action plans that allow Illinois families, businesses, and community leaders to solve problems, make informed decisions, and adapt to changes and opportunities.*

SOURCE: [Mary Liz Wright](#), Food and Nutrition Educator, Illinois Extension

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