The information in this directory is based on phone interviews conducted in December 1998, March 1999, and July 2001 with organizers of nine of Wisconsin’s community kitchen initiatives. Any inaccuracies are the responsibility of those who compiled this directory, and readers are encouraged to contact the kitchens directly for up-to-date and reliable information.

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INTRODUCTION

The contemporary concept of "community kitchens" has been around for about ten years or so. However, in a more general sense, informal approaches to sharing food processing space have been around much longer than that. In rural communities throughout Wisconsin, for example, it was often commonplace to utilize church basements to prepare food for large social events or even for retail sale.

But as food safety regulations have become more stringent (and as liability concerns have intensified), it has become necessary to develop more formal approaches to sharing food processing space. The basic need remains the same, however. People who are just starting out, or who only need a commercial kitchen on a seasonal or part-time basis, may not want to invest in their own processing facility. Under the right circumstances, they may prefer instead to share a facility with others.

A "community kitchen" (which may also be called a food business incubator, or a shared commercial kitchen) is simply a facility where caterers, food cart vendors, farmers, and producers of specialty/gourmet food items can prepare their food products in a fully licensed and certified kitchen. The kitchens, often sponsored by an umbrella nonprofit organization and/or by an existing business incubator, provide start-up businesses with the opportunity to explore food production without the high cost of buying their own equipment or constructing their own building.
Some community kitchens also offer technical assistance in food production as well as general business management skills, networking opportunities among entrepreneurs, and the opportunity to form shared services cooperatives for marketing, distribution, and supply purchasing.

Around the country, community kitchens are operating in Idaho, Hawaii, Colorado, Washington, New Mexico, New York, Vermont, New Hampshire, New Mexico, California, and Wisconsin, as well as Ontario and Saskatchewan in Canada.

In Wisconsin, the first efforts to start community kitchens were in Ashland and Superior in the mid-1990s. The Ashland kitchen was a private effort on the part of a community-oriented farmer and entrepreneur. Located far from major markets, this farmer's own experience in food processing was not very profitable, and he shut down the kitchen after a few years.

In Superior, a food processing facility was opened as part of a city/county-sponsored business incubator in 1996. Early on, the incubator as a whole ran into financial difficulties as a result of overspending on construction and furnishings. Still, the incubator and its kitchen are both open and operating, and its new managers are optimistic about overcoming that early debt load.

About the time that the Superior kitchen opened its doors, a group of academics and activists from Madison began exploring prospects for a kitchen in Spring Green. After two years of intermittent efforts, the meager grant funding ran out and the project dissolved before any significant investments were made. However, a private businessman in Spring Green is now offering his own commercial kitchen facility to others on a rental basis.

Shortly after the original Spring Green effort petered out, there was an increase in interest in community kitchens throughout the state. In September 1998, a workshop on community kitchens was offered in Stevens Point by UW-Extension and USDA Rural Development. From that workshop sprang efforts to explore and develop new kitchens in Algoma, Lac du Flambeau, Madison, Menomonie, La Crosse and Milwaukee.

Since that time, community kitchens have been opened in Menomonie and La Crosse, and ones in Algoma and Madison plan to open their doors this summer. Meanwhile, plans for kitchens in Lac du Flambeau and Milwaukee have been placed on the backburner, as part of later phases of larger projects currently underway.

**So what can we say about the success of community kitchens in Wisconsin?** Quite simply, it's too early to tell. Several of the newly opened kitchens are operating under capacity, but they are optimistic that they will reach full capacity with time. Some of these operating kitchens are part of larger business incubators, and as such they can spread their costs over a larger client base. Others have been successful at securing grant funding or favorable loans to get through the early years.

One thing is certain: the kitchens that have opened are providing a valuable service to their clients. As the word spreads, it is certainly possible that several if not all of these new and proposed kitchens will achieve a "sustainable state", whereby the income from user fees will cover the costs of operations. More importantly, the kitchens' clients that they serve will achieve their own goals and dreams as successful food businesses.
This small 1,400 sq. ft. facility is part of a larger traditional business incubator (35,000 sq. ft.). Over
the years of running the business incubator, project coordinators sensed an interest for a kitchen facility
that could be rented by the hour. Start-up costs for the kitchen, which were about $75,000–$100,000,
were covered by a City of La Crosse loan (which is forgivable if a certain number of jobs are created),
a state Department of Commerce grant, and a local bank loan.

The kitchen opened in June of 1999. At present, there is a caterer using the facility four days per
week, a Hmong family producing fresh and frozen egg rolls, and a barbecue sauce business. An
original client that produced chicken wings has since moved on. Other individuals and businesses
have rented the facility on one-time or sporadic basis for barbecues, festivals, weddings, company
picnics, and storage. At this point, daytime shifts in the kitchen are filled, but there is room for
afternoon and late night space rental.

Incubator Director Dave Loomis also stresses that the facility is an important "back-up" resource for
community food businesses. For instance, when the kitchen for the Julia Belle Swain Riverboat was
temporarily shut down, the company used the CRBC kitchen to get through the ordeal without losing
any business.

Equipment in the La Crosse kitchen includes a brazing table, a ten burner stove with two ovens, a
dishwasher, garbage disposals, racking, a walk-in cooler, two upright freezers, a 20 qt. Hobart mixer
(which can also grind meat and shred vegetables), two large microwaves, a convection oven, four 30"
x 72" stainless steel tables on castors, a slicer, a vegetable cleaning sink, and a refrigerated sandwich
unit. As far as technical assistance, Dave offers kitchen clients his insights gained from thirty years
experience in food preparation.

Regarding the kitchens future, Dave says, "It's coming along. More and more people are discovering
us. We keep getting good press coverage. It could do better, but these things take time. We're not
here just to help new businesses, but to help the community-- two desperate businesses utilized our
facility in past month alone."

LIGHTWORKS, LLC
Mark Olson
525 E Madison St
Spring Green, WI 53588
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Mark Olson and his partner own Renaissance Farms and Village Baker, two separate companies which
produce basil pesto products and pastries. They are also involved with Lightworks, LLC, which is the
entity that owns the 3,500 square foot kitchen facility in which they process their products. That kitchen is also used by a third company, Uplands Cheese, which makes specialty table cheese. The arrangement works in part because none of the companies need a kitchen full-time, so it makes sense to share a facility. Mark says that there is still room for others to rent the space if they're willing to work the evening hours.

Equipment in the kitchen includes a 4-burner stove, a 16 pan oven, a stone-deck pizza oven, a steam-jacketed kettle, Hobart mixers, a buffalo chopper, a Rondo reversible sheeter, a packaging shrink tunnel, a roll-in dishwasher, a vertical cutter-mixer.

**MENOMONIE COMMERCIAL KITCHEN INCUBATOR**
*Sponsored by West CAP*
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West CAP is a nonprofit organization in northwest Wisconsin that helps low income people start new businesses. In 1998, West CAP organized a community survey and a feasibility study that found a definite interest within the community for a kitchen incubator. The project then received grant funds from the Wisconsin Department of Commerce Community Based Economic Development Program to write the business plan for the kitchen. Eventually, enough grants and other funds were accumulated to purchase and remodel a 5,500 square foot building.

The doors of the Menomonie Commercial Kitchen Incubator opened on October 1, 2000. The kitchen itself is 1,500 square feet. In addition, the local food co-op is scheduled to move in on August 1st and rent 2,000 square feet. Covering about half of the total rent needs of the facility, the co-op will become the "anchor tenant." Uses for the remaining 2,000 square feet are still under consideration.

Currently the kitchen has four businesses licensed in the kitchen: a baked goods company, a personal chef, a caterer, and a maker of a morel mushroom product. Four others who are using the facility are in the stage of "prototype development".

As the founders expected, the kitchen is still grant subsidized. Their goal is make the kitchen self-sufficient in about three years. Technical assistance services will always subsidized.

Equipment in the facility includes a 40 qt. mixer, a dishwasher, two gas ranges and a deck oven, a steam-jacketed kettle, a tilting braising pan, a 3-door cooler and freezer, and two dry prep areas. Technical services include: a small revolving loan fund; business planning and product development assistance; dry, frozen, and cold storage; a telephone voice mail system (a virtual office), and eventually assistance with marketing and distribution. They also plan to expand 3,000 more feet in basement for storage. In close conjunction with these efforts, they are also sponsoring a farmers market in the parking lot of the facility, which has been very successful. There are now twelve vendors, up from two vendors last year when the market was in a different location.
This 2,600 square foot kitchen is part of a larger (45,000 square foot) business incubator. The incubator was opened in 1996. It was originally co-owned by the City of Superior and Douglas County. On July 1, 2000, The Development Association (formerly the Superior-Douglas County Development Association) took over ownership. Financing of the incubator was covered by a $750,000 grant from the Economic Development Administration, a $500,000 loan from the City of Superior, a $500,000 loan from Douglas County, a $25,000 grant from the Superior-Douglas County Development Association, and a $22,000 operating grant from the Wisconsin Department of Commerce.

The nonprofit Superior Business Center rents the building from the county, and the rent is used to cover the interest on the obligated bonds taken to cover construction costs. The city and county granted a moratorium on loan payments, but the Superior Business Center had to start paying back the loans in their third year of operations. They are now seeking to have some or all of the debt forgiven.

From the beginning, the financial difficulties were the result of decisions made with respect to the entire incubator, not just the kitchen. According to Michelle Johnsen, the developers spent too much money on "class A" furnishings, when more modest decor and or second hand equipment would have sufficed.

Some of the higher costs of the kitchen portion of the building were inevitable. Being located adjacent to Duluth, Minnesota, organizers felt that the kitchen should be USDA-certified so that meat products processed in the Wisconsin kitchen could be sold across state lines into Minnesota. Getting USDA-certified involved higher start-up costs.

Despite the difficult start, the incubator is still operating and plans to continue. They recently hired new management (Johnsen). Current tenants in the kitchen facility include two full time tenants (making smoked fish and biscotti), and three part-time caterers (10 hours/month). The fish company is doing well and recently opened a retail store off-site. Both of the full time operations employ three people.

Still the kitchen is operating at about 30% of desired capacity. (The overall incubator is at 65% capacity.) The goal with the kitchen is to rent the facility 20 hours per day, seven days per week (with four hours per day for downtime and cleaning.)

Originally, the kitchen devised a four tiered rent by the hour pricing plan. But organizers quickly discovered the plans were overpriced. Tenants now pay $12 per hour with no minimum time requirements. If a tenant uses the facility more than five hours a month, the kitchen charges $10 an hour.
Jensen says they need to do a lot of marketing to make prospective entrepreneurs aware of the facility. The most effective tenant recruitment mechanism remains word of mouth. They are starting to get more inquiries.

Equipment in the kitchen includes a walk in freezer and cooler, a gas range, a convection oven, a steam jacket kettle, a tilting skillet, a 20-quart mixer, and a dishwasher, and stainless steel prep tables. In addition, the incubator offers the business planning services of the Senior Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE) and the Small Business Development Center of the University of Wisconsin – Superior (UW-S). The center has a website at www.superbus.com, which offers a virtual tour of the facility.

KITCHENS IN DEVELOPMENT

**DANE COUNTY COMMERCIAL KITCHEN**

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Madison Center for Applied Technology  
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Madison, WI 53704  
608-246-4142  
don@warrentech.com

Rink DaVee, Project Contact  
Home Grown Wisconsin Cooperative  
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Mineral Point, WI 53565  
608-967-9368  
starfarm@mhtc.net

The roots of this project go back to 1994, when the nonprofit Commonwealth Development Corporation, which operates a large business incubator in Madison, did a feasibility study for a community kitchen in the city. At that time, they concluded that a kitchen incubator is more labor intensive than a traditional incubator, and that they would need a substantial subsidy or a donated building to make it happen.

By 1998, CDC wanted to take another look at the idea, and by then several other organizations and individuals had become interested. In the summer of 2000, CDC and a researcher at UW-Madison surveyed prospective kitchen users and found there was indeed interest. Meanwhile, Don Warren, owner of a for-profit business incubator, also became interested.

While others dropped back over the past year due to other commitments, Warren continued forward. He is in the process of establishing a commercial kitchen within his large incubator facility on Madison's north side. Slowed down by the need to build a customized exhaust hood and install new plumbing, he now hopes to open his doors by August 2001.

His equipment includes two 6-burner stoves, South Bend ovens, 60-quart mixers, two steam kettles, two brazing tilt kettles, large jacketed kettles (5-50 gallons), two 60 qt. Hobart mixers, two convection ovens, large pressure retorts for sterilizing low acid foods, deep fat frying equipment, a cookie machine (12 dozen/minute), walk in coolers and freezers, and industrial-scale honey processing equipment.

Warren has designed a floor plan for the 10,000 sq. ft. kitchen that segregated activities (baking, vegetable processing, and eventually meat processing.) He already has several clients lined up, including some caterers and an apple cider maker. The local health department also wants to use facility for its training needs.
Parallel to Don Warren's efforts, another effort is underway to develop a "Shared Agricultural Center". Rink DaVee, an organic farmer from Mineral Point who travels weekly to the farmers market in Madison, is leading an effort to develop new "infrastructure" in Madison that will enable an increase in markets for locally grown foods. Included in the plans for that Ag. Center is the concept of a community kitchen. Don Warren's facility on the north side of town may fit into that vision.

DaVee recently received a small grant to explore his ideas. The Dane County Executive's Office has also expressed an interest in making something like this happen.

FARM MARKET KITCHEN
Sponsored by Agricultural Heritage Resources
Mary Pat Carlson, Project Coordinator
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mcarlson@itol.com

The Farm Market Kitchen is a project of the non-profit organization, Agricultural Heritage & Resources (formerly The Kewaunee County Agricultural Tourism Association). This 9,000 square foot facility is located on the shores of Lake Michigan in the historic Main Street district of Algoma. The Farm Market Kitchen Incubator is a center for the combined activities of the incubation of food-processing entrepreneurs and the creation of agricultural heritage activities and events.

Opening August/September 2001. Reconstruction of the facility started in May of 2001 and the projected opening date of the upper level is August of this year. This level will house a 700 square foot processing kitchen equipped with commercial-grade equipment including a 10-burner stove, a convection oven, a proofer, a 40 quart mixer, a tilting braising pan, a cooler and freezer. Most of the equipment is mounted on wheels for user flexibility. The kitchen will also be used for numerous income-generating activities focusing on agricultural heritage food events including cooking schools, heritage recipe demonstrations, sampling events, etc. Tour bus visits are scheduled for the Fall of 2001.

The upper level is also home to the Good Earth Cooperative and its retail area The Good Earth Market (approximately 750 square feet). The co-op currently has 120 members. The food co-op is open to the members and the public. In addition to featuring locally grown products the co-op will also carry products produced in the Farm Market Kitchen. The opening of the co-op is planned for early August of 2001. The cooperative is the first of three projected "anchor tenants."

Other components of the upper level are the kitchen offices for staff, with additional office space available for short or long-term rental. The resource center will house a full-time office coordinator and have workstations available for processing tenants. A workshop/conference room is also available for tenant use or other rental activities.

Opening October 2001. A portion of the lower level of the facility is projected to open by October of this year. This area will include a special rental space: The Gathering Room/Event Hall for larger gatherings of 75 people seated at tables to 150 person stand-up events. Several training events are scheduled for this space.
Opening 2002. While the upper level kitchen will meet the needs of most start-up processors, caterers, and community groups, a second kitchen is planned for larger-batch processing. The lower level kitchen of approximately 1,500 square feet will accommodate several processors simultaneously. In addition to similar equipment as the upper level, it will house a separate baking unit, dehydrator, and small-batch pasteurizer.

Storage. There is limited on-site long-term storage at the present location. Additional off-site storage is planned for future needs. Project organizers feel the prime waterfront location is best utilized for income-generating heritage tourism and marketing activities.

Funding. Technical planning was funded with a combination of state and local grants ($20,000). Capital improvements for the upper level were funded through a combination of private donations, local contributions and a small bank loan (approximately $175,000). Project organizers initiated a capital campaign to address the fiscal needs of the lower level. A number of state and other grants are also being pursued. Operating funds have been provided with a combination of grants, city funding, and local contributions. The kitchen received two grants to recruit local agricultural processors, including outreach to the Hmong and Hispanic population.

Special Events. The Farm Market Kitchen will host the "Specialty Foods and Farm Marketing Conference" on November 2nd and 3rd of this year.

Processors/Tenants. At present the Farm Market Kitchen has commitments of use from one anchor tenant, eight start-up processors, and two caterers. A cooperative of processors is also being formed.

Break Even Point. The Farm Market Kitchen projects to break even in the third year. Grants and contributions will provide a portion of the funding during the first two years. However other sources of income include: tenant rental fees, co-op retail rental fees, and commission on products sold in the retail store. Primary income will come from heritage/tourism events such as the cooking schools, tours bus visits/demonstrations/samplings, and rental of the event areas.

KITCHENS ON THE BACKBURNER

FONDY FOOD CENTER
Sponsored by the Hunger Task Force of Milwaukee
Tim Locke, Director of Community Development
201 S. Hawley Court
Milwaukee, WI 53214
Phone (414) 777-0483
Fax (414) 777-0480
E-mail: tim@hungertaskforce.org

The community kitchen in this case is part of a larger development effort that is still in the early development phase. The Fondy Food Center project will enclose the existing outdoor Fondy Farmers’ Market, on Fond du Lac Avenue in Milwaukee’s near north side, to produce roughly 18,000 gross square feet of indoor public market space. In addition, the project calls to develop a full service commercial kitchen incubator facility. The overall goals of the project are to combat hunger and
poverty in Milwaukee's inner city by providing new sources of fresh, affordable food while producing opportunities for business development and employment.

The Hunger Task Force of Milwaukee (HTFM) is collaborating with the City of Milwaukee, the Milwaukee Area Technical College, and other community leaders to recruit entrepreneurs and to provide a full array of business development opportunities. The Fondy Food Center is a key component of HTFM’s work within Milwaukee’s food system which also included establishing the Milwaukee Farmers’ Market Association (a collaboration of all of Milwaukee’s markets) to ensure the existence of at least 10 retail outlets for products produced in the incubator. HTFM has also developed the Milwaukee Community Gardening Coalition to promote urban agriculture and provide additional resources for the incubator and markets.

HTFM has received federal, state, and private funding for planning and development of the Fondy project. HTFM is now organizing a development committee of local representatives to further the project. This group will serve as the “nucleus” for a new, independent corporation and function as a major component in redevelopment initiatives along Fond du Lac Avenue. Future information interests include ideas on kitchen management, tenant recruiting, and mass marketing of locally produced products.

HTFM intends to break ground on the indoor market on July 28, 2001. They will start building the community kitchen in the spring of 2002, and it will be constructed behind the indoor market.

**LAC DU FLAMBEAU KITCHEN INCUBATOR PROJECT**

*Sponsored by the Lac du Flambeau Band of Ojibwa*

Brian Gauthier, Tribal Member and UW Extension Service

P.O. Box 67

Lac du Flambeau, WI 54538

(715) 588-3303

A representative from Lac du Flambeau tribe attended a Community Kitchen workshop in September 1999. They still see the need for a community kitchen as part of their tribal farm, but at this time, they are concentrating their efforts on developing a “pick-your-own” farm.

**KITCHENS THAT ARE NO LONGER OPERATING**

**CHEQUAMEGON FARMS ORGANIC FOODS**

Ken Raspotnik, Contact person

Route 1, Box 335A

Ashland, WI 54806

(715) 682-9240 (phone and fax)

Ashland area farmer Ken Raspotik developed a 24 x 32 square foot kitchen facility in the mid-1990s. Equipment included a juicer/pulpier, chopper, crusher, and steam kettle. Ken found that there was not sufficient demand for the kitchen. He also found from his own experience that many food products that are available in the marketplace cannot be produced competitively on a small scale. He has some success with less labor-intensive items such as apple butter or mustard. 
Ken’s bottom line advice is that commercial kitchens can be a good idea, but you need lots of energy, clients who are willing to work hard and not make a profit their first years, and you need to do your homework on the product market. Many people say they will buy locally grown and produced products, but many more people buy their groceries based on the cheapest price. Even food co-ops do not necessarily buy local. Know your market and act accordingly.

At this point, this kitchen is no longer in operation. Please contact Ken Raspotnik if interested in renting or purchasing equipment.

RIVER VALLEY FOODS
Greg Lawless, Contact person
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Madison, WI 53706
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E-mail: lawless@aae.wisc.edu
Webpage: http://www.uwex.edu/ces/agmarkets/

The organizers of River Valley Foods included two UW-Madison academics, the director of a non-profit farmer organization in Madison, and several individuals from the Spring Green area. The impetus for the project came from a local food processor who was not using his kitchen fulltime, and he wished to share it with others who would help pay the rent.

A small grant from USDA allowed the group to hire a kitchen manager, who experimented with several food products on behalf of area farmers. Products included herbs, dried tomatoes, egg rolls, pestos, and salsas. Meanwhile, an attempt was made to develop a business plan for a completely equipped community kitchen with a fulltime kitchen manager.

Ultimately, the project failed. Fortunately, it never made enough progress to borrow any money. The project ended with very minimal debts, which were either paid off or forgiven. Many lessons were learned through the course of the project, some of which are listed below:

☞ Take the time to develop broad and deep community support for the project. Offer a range of ways for people to get involved.

☞ It's a long road to success. Build in mini-victories along the way, each of which involves as many stakeholders as possible.

☞ Develop a conservative business plan, recognizing that significant subsidies may be necessary in the early years as a supplement to rents and fees.

☞ Make sure your building and equipment is squared away before offering assistance to prospective users, or building up expectations.

☞ Don't reinvent the wheel. Tap existing resources for expertise such as product development.
Kitchen staff (and outside specialists) can support prospective processors, but they certainly cannot be the driving force behind their clients' product development efforts.

A community kitchen project may need a single, dedicated "project champion." Management-by-committee is not efficient or effective. The project champion cannot come from outside of the community.

OTHER RESOURCES

ACEnet
Appalachian Center for Economic Networks
94 Columbus Road
Athens, OH 45701
Phone: (740) 592-3854
http://www.acenetworks.org/frames/framesfoodventures.htm

ACEnet's community kitchen is one of the most successful in the country.

ACEnet's June Holley visited Wisconsin in September 1998 to offer her insights to the leaders of efforts to start community kitchens in Wisconsin.

Duncan Hilchey
Cornell Co-op Extension
Farming Alternatives Program
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Duncan has researched community kitchens around the country. He visited Wisconsin in September 1998 to offer his insights to the leaders of efforts to start community kitchens in Wisconsin.

Cameron Wold
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Cameron has become a national expert on community kitchens. He developed a manual, called Establishing a Shared-Use Commercial Kitchen, which has become a kind of "Bible" for those starting new kitchens around the country.

Cameron visited Wisconsin in May 1999 to offer his insights to the leaders of efforts to start community kitchens in Wisconsin.
OPEN
1. Superior, (715) 392-4749
2. Menomonie, (715) 235-8525
3. La Crosse, (608) 782-8022
4. Spring Green, (608) 588-2230

IN DEVELOPMENT (or on backburner)
5. Madison, (608) 246-4142 *
6. Milwaukee, (414) 777-0483
7. Algoma, (920) 487-2709 *
8. Lac du Flambeau, (715) 588-3303

* Set to open Summer 2001